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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIAN COURIER

Praying for an advent miracle in Egypt

Dena Nicolai

For Coptic Orthodox Christians around the world, Nov. 25 marked the beginning of the Holy Nativity Fast, a 43 day period in which Copts abstain from consuming animal products (aside from seafood), before the Feast of the Nativity on Jan. 7. In anticipation of the coming of the Word Incarnate, the first 40 days commemorate the 40 days in which Moses fasted before receiving the Word of God in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:28), while the additional three days were added in memory of the fast by Christians near Cairo before the miraculous moving of the Moqattam mountain in the 10th century.

In Egypt, the heart of the Coptic Church, the fast this year comes during a period of terrible uncertainty and conflict. At time of writing, thousands of Egyptians are taking to the streets to demonstrate either their support or opposition to President Mohamed Morsi's comprehensive new powers, including the authority to exclude Egypt's judges from challenging executive decisions. On Dec. 7, Islamist backers of the President vowed to "redeem" Egypt for Islam, while large crowds of protestors surrounded the President's palatial home chanting for the fall of the regime. Unrest continued into the following week.

Egyptian lawyers raise their hands during a Coptic Christian prayer in Tahrir Square.

Morsi has also declared that the constituent assembly – in charge of drafting the new constitution – could not be dissolved by the Supreme Constitutional Court, which had been mounting a challenge against the assembly's legitimacy. Though Morsi later rescinded his powers, he has also given the army the power to arrest citizens at will until the end of the referendum, stifling protests and raising fears about human rights violations. All of this worries Egyptian Christians.

"I feel frustrated about this decision … we have the feeling that [Morsi] is empowering the Islamic groups over the other bodies. [And we feel] we as Christians will be the first victims of what is happening, especially after the pullout of the Church representative from the constitution committee," says Wael Rezkalla, 23. He's a Copt and Senior Program Specialist at the Institute of International Education in Cairo, referring to a boycott of the constituent assembly and the new constitution by Coptic Church representatives and secular and liberal groups.

The "Dilemocracy"

The referendum on the draft constitution is the latest of what *The Economist* calls a "Dilemocracy" to face Egypt: if Egyptians vote "yes," they will be acquiescing to a constitution that has many worried over the place of religion in state affairs, freedom of expression, as well as the rights of women and minorities. Yet finally having the constitution approved will allow for new elections in the legislature, as well as the opportunity to enforce legal limits on President Morsi's executive power. A "no" vote, while sending a clear message to Morsi, would not immediately constrain his power, nor necessarily result in the drafting of a better constitution.

A Coptic Christian priest enters St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo Nov. 4.

There are also growing concerns over the transparency of any popular vote. "I strongly refuse to have this referendum happen. . . . [The Muslim Brotherhood] is using dirty ways to attract [voters]," says Wael.

Meanwhile, the escalating conflict between Morsi supporters and opponents continues to make global headlines. "The constitution makes Morsi a god that cannot be tried or questioned by Parliament or the

See ***Egypt*** *on page 2*

On the edge of the fiscal cliff:

Political division weakens U.S.

Rachel Baarda

In one week, on Jan. 1, 2013, a series of Bush-era tax cuts are set to expire and a set of spending cuts will begin. These measures are expected to create a steep decline in the U.S. government's deficit, a situation known as the "fiscal cliff." President Barack Obama may find that tackling the fiscal cliff will prove even harder than winning his re-election.

The spending cuts and the expiration date for the Bush tax cuts were part of the 2011 Budget Control Act, which was a compromise to raise the public debt ceiling. Even though the debt ceiling was lifted in 2011, public debt in the U.S. is still climbing rapidly. As of Nov. 30, 2012, the American public debt had reached 11.5 trillion dollars. All the laws leading to the fiscal cliff were designed to slow the growth of the U.S. debt by cutting the U.S. budget deficit in half.

While going over the fiscal cliff might slow the growth of the U.S.

See ***Fiscal cliff*** *on page 2*

News

Egypt *continued*

judiciary," said one of the protest coordinators in Alexandria who was interviewed by a journalist for the newspaper *Egypt Independent*. As violence between the opposing groups (and riot police) erupts, anger on social media sites like Facebook turns to practical concerns such as sharing the names of hospitals that have space to accept the wounded, as well as updates on movement of protests and lists of the injured.

Not for this

The Egyptian opposition, represented by former presidential candidates Mohamed El Baradei (the former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency) and Amr Moussa (previously the Secretary-General of the League of Arab Nations), said in a joint news conference that they hold Morsi accountable for the violence, according to the BBC. "Our opinion was, and still is, that we are ready for dialogue if the constitutional decree is cancelled . . . and the referendum on this constitution is postponed," El Baradei told the assembled press. "The revolution did not happen for this. It happened for freedom, democracy and human dignity."

Both Wael and fellow Copt Mariam*, a pharmacist, feel that Morsi is supported only by a minority in the country, albeit a vocal and organized one. For Mariam, the relationship between Muslims and Christians has not deteriorated since Morsi's election in June. "All of us are against him except those whom he bought with money and sugar bags!" she declares.

"Most of my Muslim friends hate the Muslim Brotherhood, and they have their own concerns about them," agrees Wael, who hopes to join those in Tahrir Square in coming days, believing along with Mariam and many others that these protests are one of Egypt's strongest hopes.

President Morsi addresses his supporters.

A few short weeks ago, Cairo's attention was temporarily turned east as Egyptians anxiously watched the ongoing tensions between Israel and Hamas explode. In the street, opinions were divided. While Egyptians traditionally support the Palestinians, there was a new feeling that Egypt has enough of its own problems. However, despite Western and Israeli fears that the new Muslim Brotherhood government in Cairo might not uphold the decades-old peace treaty with Israel, Morsi played a deciding role in negotiating a truce. Though a good sign for Western governments, Morsi's actions were somewhat meaningless to Egyptians, whose current domestic concerns override their feelings on their president's foreign policy.

Is Egypt dying?

Morsi says he will give up his sweeping powers once the referendum has been held. However, for a country used to pharaohs like Hosni Mubarak, the promise rings hollow. "By following Morsi, I feel the chances of development and freedom will be very limited," says Wael.

As the Christmas lights and trees come down in Canada, Egyptians continue their season of expectancy – waiting, hoping, praying for Egypt, and looking to the Incarnation. "By fasting, we are preparing our bodies to go through the amazing process of receiving a new creation in Christ," says Mariam. "We are to quit everything related to the old creation to celebrate the birth of Christ which is the joy of life." Yet amidst the anticipation of this joy, the present realities remain grim. "Sometimes I feel like Egypt is dying," continues Mariam. "The future looks dull but I pray and believe that God will do miracles. I hope we as Christians can focus on developing our country and continuing in our efforts for the sake of God. Being a Christian contributes a lot to my hope."

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*

Dena Nicolai is a student in the Master of Christian Studies Program at Regent College in Vancouver.

Fiscal cliff *continued*

public debt, it would also create waves both in the United States economy and the global economy. The Congressional Budget Office has suggested that as the tax increases and spending cuts are implemented, the U.S. economy will slip back into recession, at least temporarily. As a result of the fiscal cliff, the U.S. GDP may drop by four percent and unemployment could rise by a full percentage point. Furthermore, the fiscal cliff would affect countries like Canada, which sends many of its exports to the U.S. An economist with the TD Bank, Craig Alexander, told CBC News that the fiscal cliff could "wipe out economic growth in Canada" (Nov. 9).

Averting disaster

Faced with the potentially dangerous economic effects of the fiscal cliff, both Republicans and Democrats agree that the cliff could be side-stepped by less drastic economic measures. The two parties, however, have sharply different ideas on how to do that.

Despite Obama's victory in the recent election, he still needs to work with Republicans to accomplish his goals. Republicans maintain control of the House of Representatives, while the Democrats control the Senate. As a result, both parties have to compromise to avert the cliff. If no compromise is reached, the measures leading to the fiscal cliff will automatically take effect at midnight on December 31st.

As of the writing of this article, President Obama's plan to avoid the cliff involves $1.6 trillion in new taxes, partly from letting the George W. Bush tax cuts expire. Instead of raising taxes, however, Republicans argue that they could raise $2.2 trillion by reducing tax exemptions and reductions, raising Medicare eligibility age and slowing increases in social security costs.

As a concession to the GOP, Obama has suggested increasing taxes on only the wealthiest two percent of Americans. This proposal is not satisfactory to the Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, who vows, along with his fellow Republicans, not to raise taxes. While the Republicans reject plans involving tax increases, the Obama administration refuses to listen to Republican counter-proposals that involve tax reform.

Both sides portray each other as self-interested and intransigent. But a recent Pew Research poll shows that Obama has the public on his side: if fiscal cliff talks fail, 53 percent of respondents would blame Republicans, while only 27 percent would blame Obama.

In the aftermath of November's election, journalists were quick to portray the United States as more divided than ever. Young voters, female voters and especially minority voters flocked to Obama, while the Republican Party acquired the unwelcome but not altogether inaccurate epithet of "the old, white man's party." More than this, though, only 57.5 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote in 2012, lower than in the past two elections.

Is the United States really more divided than ever in its history? That's a tall claim, given the Civil War. But the recent election and the fiscal cliff talks have demonstrated that in many ways, the United States is a divided country. Division undoubtedly weakens the United States, socially, economically and politically. The world still looks to America to provide economic and political stability; but Jesus said in Matthew 12:25: "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand."

Unity begins with the church

How should Christians in the United States and Canada respond to the problem of the fiscal cliff? Is one fiscal cliff proposal better than the other? How can we know whether either political party is telling the complete truth about the behind-the-scenes-negotiations?

Most Christians in North America – especially now that the election is over – cannot directly influence the economic decisions of the United States. We can pray for wisdom for America's leaders and pray for honesty and clarity in the media and among America's leaders. Nevertheless, we should also take Jesus' words to heart as we look at the current state of division in American politics.

CANADIAN PRESS

Will the fiscal cliff affect Canada's economic growth?

As president, Barack Obama bears the greatest responsibility for the unity of the United States. With a high political office comes responsibility for the well-being of an entire nation. As fiscal cliff talks have dragged, Obama has returned to the campaign trail, calling for support for his economic proposals among the public and business leaders. Christians should watch Obama's behaviour, as well as the actions of other political leaders like John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi, for signs indicating whether the United States is on a path towards greater unity or greater division. We should continue to be watchful and to pray; and we should remember that Jesus prayed not for unity in government, but for unity in the church. As world governments grow more divided and restive, we should pray that the worldwide church becomes a place of greater unity and peace.

Rachel Baarda graduated this past spring with her M.A. in Communications from the University of Ottawa, where she wrote a thesis on Barack Obama's social networking site. Her research is published in the International Journal of Technoethics. She currently lives in Vineland, Ont. and works in Hamilton.

Column

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

Junk DNA, chimpanzees, and God's Creation

When the human genome (our DNA) was sequenced in 2001, scientists were expecting to find a lot of genes, more than 100,000. Their rationale was that up to that point, research had indicated that the production of proteins was the primary function of human DNA, and genes are the parts of DNA that make proteins. Scientists instead found only about 30,000 genes. (More recent work suggests even fewer, only about 21,000.) On the basis of this finding, scientists concluded that only about 1 percent of our DNA is involved in making proteins. They could not determine the function of the rest of our DNA, leading them to wonder whether a large part of our over three billion DNA bases were "junk DNA." This seemed problematic: was 99 percent of our DNA useless?

These findings have opened a floodgate for further DNA research.

This year the idea of junk DNA has been exploded, thanks to a consortium of over 440 biology researchers in 30 institutions working since 2003 on the ENCODE (*Ency*clopedia *of* DNA *E*lements) project. In early September the ENCODE consortium published about 30 papers in major science journals, reporting that over 80 percent of our DNA sequence has a function in regulating how our cells work.

Specifically, some parts of the genome, upstream from the genes, are "promoters" that enable the genes to be activated; other parts of the genome are "enhancers" that regulate the expression of more distant genes. In other words, the information stored on our DNA is not just information to be read (genes) but also instructions on how to read the information and, if you like, which language it is in.

These findings fundamentally change our understanding of the connections between a person's DNA, the body he or she has and the unique individual he or she becomes. Genes responsible for producing specific proteins are no longer the most important pieces of information held in our DNA. Instead, it is the parts of the DNA that *control* the gene factories and switch them on, up, down, or off that are much more important. While we used to be impressed with the length of our DNA in terms of the number of base pairs involved, the complexity of the instructions is even more daunting than we realized.

Nothing wasted

These ENCODE findings have and will continue to open a floodgate for further DNA research. I suspect that when the dust settles, it will be clear that our DNA has no or very few junk parts. Our God did not design junk DNA. This research also has potential to help us understand the very large differences between chimpanzees and humans, which have always puzzled scientists because we and chimps share so many genes (over 90 percent). One researcher recently reported that up to 40 percent of the differences between gene expression in humans and chimps are due to the differences in regulatory mechanisms: the genetic similarity is overturned by large differences in how the genes are expressed and interact.

For Christians these findings from science confirm various aspects of our faith. They demonstrate that we are complex creatures, whose inner workings are still objects of wonder and mystery, reflective of the glory of our Lord. Creation is a garden of wonders and scientists are only really just starting to appreciate its complexity, as this DNA research demonstrates.

Second, the discovery that there are big differences in the gene control systems in humans and the great apes mirrors what we see in our day to day life; only we are made in God's image, with the responsibility for the care of creation. The genes may not be that different, maybe because we were created on the same day as all the animals, but the way that the systems are controlled is crucial.

Some Christians feel that science undercuts their faith. In the case of this work, which has explored the mysteries of our DNA, the findings seem to suggest that our faith is congruent with our science. Perhaps we can see this as an unexpected gift from the 440 researchers to all Christians, not unlike the gifts of the wise men to our Lord. Blessings to you all in this season of celebration.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who probably has typical human regulatory mechanisms, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

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Bishop to Egyptian Catholics: Church 'enlightens' your conscience, then you choose

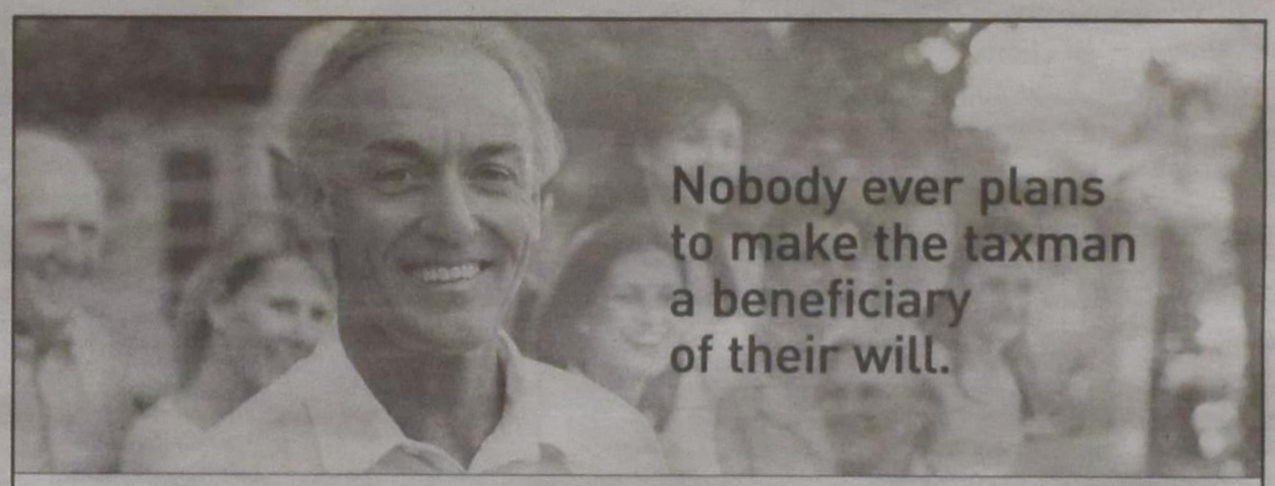
Bishop Zaki will not ask Christians to boycott the referendum.

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt (Fides) – An Egyptian Catholic leader has sharply criticized the sweeping constitutional changes proposed by President Mohamed Morsi, but said that the Catholic Church in Egypt will not tell the faithful to boycott a constitutional referendum.

Morsi's proposal, which was to have been introduced on December 15, giving him broad new presidential powers, "divides the country," according to Bishop Adel Zaki, the apostolic vicar of Alexandria. However, Bishop Zaki said that it would be inappropriate for church officials to tell lay people how they should (or should not) vote.

"Churches must enlighten consciences and encourage discernment based on principles of justice," said Bishop Zaki. "But then everyone has to choose according to their consciences, in full freedom. Churches cannot ask Christians to boycott the referendum."

Before the increase in violence and the nightmarish civil war that looms over the country, according to Bishop Zaki, "The work of the forces of civil society should be supported which propose dialogue between the parties in conflict."



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Editorials

Meat as a side dish

Nandy Heule

Our family never had a steak-'n'-potato kind of kinship.

When our two girls lived at home, we loved eating a wide variety of dishes – macaroni and meatballs, yes, but also a hot Thai curry, Mexican enchiladas or a soufflé with a French banquette. Nevertheless, cutting out meat all together wasn't my priority as an employed mom, nor did I feel my marathon-running spouse would be well fed with a raw carrot and beet salad with a side of marinated Tofu.

A few years ago, when visiting home from university for two weeks in the spring, the kids told me they no longer cooked with meat. I was a good mom. I pulled out all the stops and the veggie burgers. It was a chore. But I wasn't terribly amused to get an email from the kids that exclaimed the heavenly taste of *Bratwurst* and beer the very first day our two girls arrived in Germany to start a Euro trip. So much for not eating meat.

However, more recently, I read the book *No Happy Cows*. The title tells it all: pigs, chickens and cows aren't treated like they used to be on family farms. At big factory farms, animals are but nameless commodities.

Around the same time, I happened to open the Bible to Genesis and re-read the creation stories. Maybe it was the Spirit's leading. Interestingly, in the Garden of Eden, God says, "I have given you every plant yielding seed . . . and every tree with seed in its fruit." He gives a similar command to every beast and bird. Simply put, there's no talk of building chicken coops.

Pre-fall style

My youngest daughter recently pointed out, before the Fall into sin, all God's creatures lived in harmony. The wolf may have been big, but it wasn't envisioning dinner when it spotted the three little piglets. God says, "Everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." Not until after the Fall did men start hunting for meat while women worked the land with sweat on their brows.

Much of the meat we eat today is raised in huge farm factories. These factories, as well as massive slaughter houses that process their animals, put significant pressure on their environments; they are competitive threats to family farms whose owner-operators name their animals one by one.

Meat consumption has almost tripled since 1960, especially in developed countries. Such large-scale meat production is possible only by feeding animals a corn-based diet and antibiotics while packing them densely into feeding lots.

Far be it from me to say meat can't be enjoyed in modest quantities and on special occasions. Let's admit it: biting into a juicy hamburger is a summer ritual most of us can't live without. But, maybe we could consider going back to eat meat the way our grandparents did – meat as a side dish.

Even when I grew up, my mom made one *rookworst* (link sausage of about 30 cm) for a family of six. My mother-in-law turned a pound of hamburger, breadcrumbs and eggs into enough meatballs to feed 10 mouths at supper.

Now I'm an empty nester, I may have time again to replace meat with mountains of fresh vegetables, wait the 50 minutes it takes to cook brown rice or simmer a bean stew on the stove top for a hour. I'm going to give it a serious try to cook without meat.

Empty nesters and older generations may do well to listen to our young university kids who seek to respond to God's call in simple ways – for starters, by eating less meat. My girls still don't cook with meat, and they are teaching me how to do so as well.

And, they continue to seek new adventures. My husband and I dropped off our oldest daughter recently to go to the Northern Yukon for a summer job with a tourism outfit. Ironically, she'll be cooking at a hunting camp where meat will be front and centre.

Come to think of it, in addition to learning how to eat – less meat, one of the more important things I learned so far since becoming an empty nester is this. Keep an open mind, always.

Nandy Heule is a communications consultant based in Toronto. She can be reached at nandyheule@heulecommunications.com.

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Leaving everything behind

Bert Witvoet

China is a complex country. That's partly because it has such a large population. You can't generalize about 1.3 billion people, representing 55 officially recognized ethnic groups in addition to the Han majority. Furthermore, it's not an open society with a democratic government. Official statements about the nature of society in China are not reliable. Without freedom of speech, the true story of what takes place in China does not easily emerge.

Take the plight of Christians in China. On the surface it seems that there is freedom of religion. Millions of Christians worship more or less without much disturbance. But the story is confusing here. It all depends on the local authorities. In some areas of China, Christians are definitely persecuted. *World* magazine recently published the story of three "Daniels of the Year." These are three Christian leaders who are tortured, harassed and jailed for speaking up for freedom of religion.

Being a follower

While reading the stories of each Christian leader and their families, I reflected on what Jesus said about what it means to follow him. It boils down to a willingness to give up everything. It's the one thing the rich young ruler, who tried to follow all the commandments of Moses, could not do. And we don't know what happened next – whether he lost out on the inheritance or not. Jesus did say that, although it is easier for a camel to squeeze through the extremely narrow gate called the Needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, he added that with God all things are possible. The next discussion Jesus had with Peter drives the point home: "Peter said to him, 'We have left everything to follow you.' Jesus acknowledged that and replied: 'No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age and in the age to come, eternal life.'"

Guo Quan's wife Li Jing testifies at U.S. congressional hearing regarding her husband's innocence.

He left everything behind

Not many of us are tested the way the three Chinese Daniels and their families are tested. Take, for example, Guo Quan, 44 years old, previously a professor at Nanjing Normal University. He dared to discuss Christian principles in class. He was fired after some students complained about his views. He then published articles on the Internet criticizing the one-party dictatorship, corruption and human rights abuses. On November 13, 2008, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. His wife Li, whose working hours were reduced, was constantly harassed. She made the difficult decision to flee to the U.S. with her son and advocate for her husband and his cause. But first she wanted her husband's approval.

Li visited her husband in jail, where a glass partition separated them. During the talk, she placed her one hand on the glass. On her thumb she had written in small script: "I take our son and go to the U.S." Guo read the text and slowly nodded. Li knew she had his approval. She succeeded afterwards in defecting to the U.S. with her son.

In the meantime, Guo languishes in jail. He knows that by the time he will be released his son will be a man. He wrote a letter, which was smuggled from prison, to his son. In it he wrote: "Many people want their children to be rich, preeminent, powerful or great…. Only a righteous person could be preeminent. My son, please remember what God taught us: It is meaningless to be rich and powerful if I am not righteous."

A challenging passage

The stories of these Daniels bring out clearly what Jesus meant. Following Jesus is about leaving behind. Jesus himself exemplified this leaving behind better than anyone could. We read in Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!"

The kicker for us, though, is that a simple statement precedes this passage: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." Ouch! The Chinese dissidents took that message literally. Do we?

Bert Witvoet, who lives in St. Catharines, Ont., dabbles at leaving behind. He counts on joining the camel in squeezing through the eye of a needle.

Letters

New language for new times in Christian schooling

I appreciate Mary Kooy's insight, courage, vision and desire to spur Christian schools to be more than they have been ("Breaking the silence," Nov. 12). I also want to say upfront that I don't think her analysis or criticism of the past (or present) is altogether wrong. Christian schools have not always been the bastions of either critical analysis or communities that look outward to include the "other." I do want to challenge her perception, however, that Christian schools and the Christian school movement are defunct and bereft of vision or energy.

Let me begin by saying that as Christian educators, we have a dual task: to be excellent, innovative educators who have sifted the best of educational practice and to be Christians who have at our heart the joyful modeling of the Christian life. In the last number of years, the Christian education movement has sought to be much more professional and much more connected with the educational innovations that are sweeping all schools in the 21st century. Our teachers are encouraged to be members of the Ontario College of Teachers; educators have been sponsored to attend and participate in leading-edge, innovative educational conferences where they can dialogue and share new ideas with their colleagues; the Education Departments of both Redeemer University College and Tyndale University College are recognized and endorsed by the provincial powers that be.

At Edifide, our goal is to be an association where interactive dialogue can be had about educational practice and issues. Our emphases in professional development have been to seek out the best in educational practice at the same time as asking the essential question of "Why Christian education?" Our association seeks to be that intersection point for Christians interested in dialogue about education and faith. In fact, our association recently changed its name to Edifide, a new word combining Educator and Fidelity (Faith), and our wish is to be an association where Christian educators from ANY school system can meet and discuss and dialogue and challenge each other. Our tagline is "For those with Faith in Education."

It is true that we need to continually ask good and insightful questions like the following:

- Why do we do what we do? What is our vision for distinctively Christian education?
- How will we achieve this? What strategies?
- Where is this Christian education found? What type of community will we cultivate?
- Who are our students? Do we know our students as learners?
- What shall we gather around? What shall we teach?
- How are we doing? How will we measure or evaluate student learning?

I look forward to more dialogue and to more questions on how to help shape our Christian schools into places of thriving, authentic, Christian learning. At Edifide, we are committed to finding the language to do this difficult work of learning *from* and learning *with* the larger educational community.

Diane Stronks
Executive Director
Edifide Christian Educators Association

Critical dialogue needs willing parties on both sides

Thank you Mary Kooy for submitting a provocative article designed to encourage critical conversations ("Breaking the Silence," Nov. 12). I agree with her assessment that certain critical discussions are not happening in the Christian schools in Canada because they have isolated themselves from the broader educational environment. However, I disagree with her on the causes for this state of affairs. While every school system has its linguistic identity bubble, I am sure that the obvious biblical terminology is not the main problem preventing dialogue. My experience with public school educators has been that they are as ideologically entrenched in their terminology as we Christian educators are in ours. As an OISE faculty member, perhaps she could explain why the well-funded public university faculties and research institutes, like hers, never invite independent school educators to their meetings as contributors? Is it perhaps that the elephants do not feel the need to talk with the mice in the room?

To put the issue a little more bluntly, is there a desire for open dialogue on all sides? For example, is anyone in the public system paying attention to the results of the excellent CARDUS study? It seems to me that a "critical dialogue" requires at least two willing parties around a common table.

Adrian Guldemond
Ancaster, Ont.

Healthy conversation is happening

I want to thank Mary Kooy ("Breaking the Silence," Nov. 12) for wanting to provide what she sees as necessary correction for the Christian school movement, but in my experience, I would suggest that her two key points miss their mark.

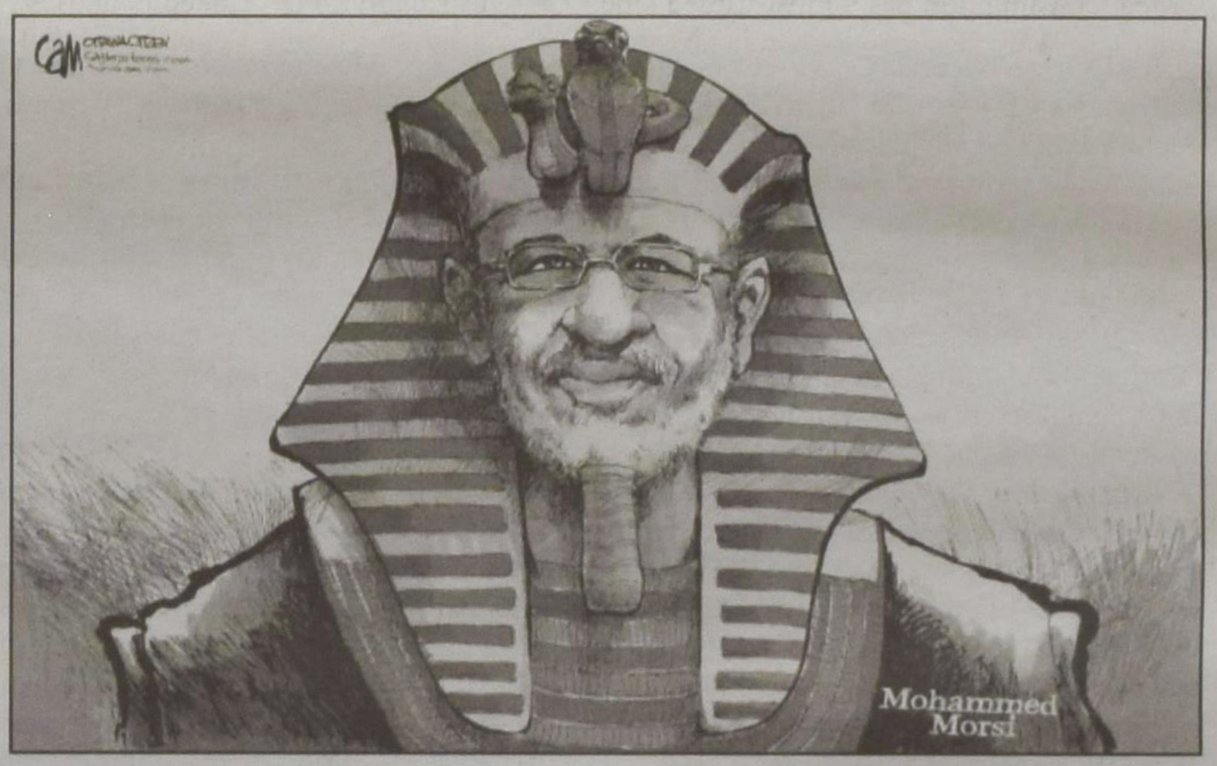
After sharing her personal experience, Ms. Kooy's first point relates to those in the Christian school movement too commonly falling into "God talk" – language appropriate for churches and not for professional conversations or educational settings. But I think this misunderstands the difference between saying the sphere of the church and the spheres of other social organizations are to be distinct, and saying that our Christianity – even openly displayed – is to be limited to one of those spheres. To paraphrase H. Evan Runner, "We may talk about the distinction between the church and school, but our Christianity undergirds them both." By this he meant that when people are engaged in activities outside those that legitimately fall in the church's sphere they are nonetheless still Christians, and speaking and acting that way would still be appropriate. Those who fail to make this distinction often end up inadvertently suggesting that our Christian principles don't have a place in public domain discussions. I don't think Ms. Kooy would say that directly, but I think the way she phrases her argument does lead us down that road.

Vibrant interaction

The second point in Ms. Kooy's article contends that Christian schools are inappropriately insulated from the broader discussions going on in education. This is not my experience. Was this the case in certain places and at certain times in the past? I suppose that is possible. But when I look around the OACS-related schools in our area this is what I see: high schools like Hamilton and Smithville Christian pursuing "Project-Based Learning" and partnerships with local municipalities and environmental groups. I see a whole host of high school representatives making an excursion to "High Tech High" in San Diego to converse with folks in the public system on the cutting edge of this exciting initiative in education. I see grade school teachers from Beacon Christian leading seminars on "Reading Success in the Early Years" developed in consultation with the reading consultant who worked with the District School Board of Niagara. Our own schools at NACE (John Knox Christian in Stoney Creek and Covenant Christian in Smithville) are implementing the "All Kinds of Minds" understanding of neurodevelopment as a framework for reaching every type of mind that God has seen fit to create in our students. And I haven't even touched on the exciting things happening at King's Christian in Oakville or Guelph Community Christian!

These are just the examples that jump to mind. Cloistered and simply speaking to each other? That's not what I see! Rather than silence, there is a vibrant, healthy level of conversation with anyone we believe can help us be more effective in the task God has set before us: helping to shape the next generation of articulate, engaged and active Christians so that they can be agents of change and reconciliation wherever God may use them.

Tony Kamphuis
Executive Director,
Niagara Association for Christian Education



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News

Despite persecution, in 20 years China will have most Christians worldwide

Marian Van Til, *with files from CNA/Pew/Asia Harvest*

ROME – A noted theologian has asserted that China will be home to the majority of the world's Christians within the next two decades. Harvey Cox, theologian, prolific writer and 2009 retiree from a professorship at Harvard Divinity School, made the statement on Dec. 1 to an audience at Jesuit Gregorian University in Rome.

Cox was in Rome to engage in public discussion with the two editors of a new book, *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study.* The editors were Ilaria Morali, Director of the Department of Missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and Cardinal Karl Josef Becker, a German theologian of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Cox noted that, given the situation in China, "Interfaith dialogue is something that China . . . lives with every day." He also made the important point that "there are two world phenomena happening right now. The first is that we can't recognize Christianity as a Western religion anymore, and the second is that countries with the fastest growing number of Christians don't have a Christian culture or traditions."

Numbers hard to envision

The actual number of Christian in present-day China is hard to nail down, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. That's because "aside from the fact that China does not ask about religion on its census, there is no fully representative survey of China's 1.3 billion people. A further complication is that a substantial number of Christians – the majority – worship in independent, unregistered ['house'] churches." In addition, though the Chinese government won't admit it, Christians who refuse to join the officially sanctioned churches suffer persecution.

Many Chinese Christians worship in "underground" house churches.

China currently is the world's most populous country, with 1.3 billion people. According to Pew's estimate, it is presumed to be seventh on the list in terms of its Christian population, with roughly 67 million Christians, or five percent of the population. Among those, about 9 million are Catholics.

Christians affiliated with the state-approved Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement number roughly 23 million (1.7 percent of the population). A Pew estimates that an additional 35 million Chinese Christians (2.6 percent of the population) are affiliated with unregistered churches or attend state-approved churches without having formal membership. There are, besides that, small populations of Orthodox and other Christians, some of whom are expatriates.

Detailed numbers from every place

Meanwhile, a group called Asia Harvest has been conducting a comprehensive study of the Chinese population and the number of Chinese Christians for more than a decade. Asia Harvest is an inter-denominational Christian ministry that works alongside Asian church leaders to plant congregations in the approximately 1000 still unreached people groups in seven Asian countries: China, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Bhutan and northern India.

Asia Harvest now has detailed information – not just estimates – on the Chinese population that covers "all 2,371 cities and counties, within all 33 provinces and regions of China." It undertook this long study because "simply estimating the number of Christians in China has become controversial," its website points out. "Wildly divergent figures have been published, ranging from 20 million to 230 million."

Asia Harvest's website carefully explains its methodology and provides detailed tables of numbers which tally individual Christians throughout the vast country. Their conclusions: in 2011 there were, 105, 316,752 Christians in China, or 7.71 percent of the population. (See **aisaharvest.org** for details.)

The Spirit is working and those numbers are steadily growing, says Asia Harvest. It is not hard to see that Harvey Cox's prediction will come true 20 years from now.

Violence against Christians moves Nigeria to 7th on terror-affected nations list

KADUNA, Nigeria (CNS) – Boko Haram's violent jihad against Christians in Nigeria pushed the West African country into seventh place in annual rankings of countries impacted by terrorism, lending weight to calls for the U.S. State Department to reconsider its decision not to designate the group as a "foreign terrorist organization."

Nigeria's ranking in the latest Global Terrorism Index, released earlier this month, marked a shift from 12th place last year, from 16th place in 2008, and from 30th place in 2005. The top six countries this year are Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Yemen and Somali.

Produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the index is calculated based on the number of terrorist incidents, the number of deaths, the number of casualties and the level of property damage. The four indicators are used to create a weighted five-year average that takes into account the lasting effects of terrorism.

Nearly 500 deaths

The newly-published rankings relate to 2011, a year during which 168 terror attacks were recorded in Nigeria. Those attacks accounted for 437 deaths and 614 injuries.

In 2012, however, before year's end there have been more than 700 Nigerian Christian deaths in Boko Haram-related violence, according to the Christian Association of Nigerian-Americans (CANAN), a group formed in New York last September. The looming Christmas period could well bring more, if past years are a guide.

Ten Christians were reported to have been killed on Dec. 1 after suspected Boko Haram attackers set alight houses and knifed inhabitants in a mostly Christian part of a village in Nigeria's far northwestern Borno state. Three days later attackers in another northern state, Kano, shot dead two policemen and threw homemade bombs at a bus, wounding several people.

On Dec. 6 a government agency reported that 27 schools in two northern states had been destroyed in recent Boko Haram attacks, the Lagos daily *Guardian* reported. Non-Muslim schools are a key target for the group, whose name roughly translates "Western education is forbidden."

U.S. turning a blind eye?

Despite the escalating violence, the Obama administration has rejected calls that Boko Haram be named a "foreign terrorism organization" (FTO). It did name three Boko Haram individuals last June under an executive order designed to disrupt funding to terrorists. Some members of the U.S. Congress who have been pressing for FTO designation, including Homeland Security Committee chairperson Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), called the step inadequate.

Boko Haram has vowed to "cleanse" northern Nigeria of Christians. It wants to extend sharia (Islamic law), which is currently implemented in 12 northern states, across the entire country, 40 percent of whose people are Christians. The group has also demanded that Nigeria's Christian president, Goodluck Jonathan, convert to Islam or resign.

Yet Obama administration officials have played down religion as the primary motivation for the group.

Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs Johnnie Carson told a U.S. Senate hearing this past spring that religion was "not the primary driver behind extremist violence in Nigeria." He insisted that Boko Haram was exploiting "the legitimate grievances of northern populations to garner recruits and public sympathy." Carson acknowledged reports of links between Boko Haram elements and al-Qaeda extremists, but asserted that the Nigerian group's main focus was on "local Nigerian issues and actors."

However, in a report last month, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) cited the strongly religious character of the group's violent campaign. "The attacks have been committed pursuant to the policy defined at the leadership level of Boko Haram, which aims at imposing an exclusive Islamic system of government in northern Nigeria at the expense of Christians specifically," it said.

The prosecutor added that there is a reasonable basis to believe the group has committed crimes against humanity, including murder and "persecution," which the ICC defines in part as the "targeting of an identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender or other ground." The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, too, agrees that Boko Harma's actions are "religiously related."

Results of a church bombing, Christmas Day 2011.

False impression

U.S. Rep. Pat Meehan (R-Pa.) introduced a resolution last May that would require the State Department to report on whether Boko Haram meets the criteria for FTO designation, and if not give detailed reasons for the decision. The measure was referred to a judiciary subcommittee.

The Barnabas Fund, an aid agency working among Christian minorities in Muslim countries, said in an editorial on Dec. 6 that when the U.S. State Department uses terms like "sectarian violence" to describe the situation in Nigeria it "creates the false impression that Christians are equal participants."

"It has maintained the view that the Islamist group is driven by economic grievances, despite explicit statements from Boko Haram about its violent intentions towards Christians and calls for an Islamic state in the North. How many more Christians need to be savagely murdered, attacked at church or driven from their homes before the Nigerian government and the U.S. State Department are willing to label Boko Haram as the terrorist organization that it is?" Barnabas asked.

News

Putting faith in action through meat canning

Gladys Terichow

WINKLER, Man.–When the mobile 64-hour, around-the-clock meat canner run by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) came to Winkler, Manitoba, Elaine Dueck, 15, had been eagerly anticipating their arrival.

As Dueck washed, dried and labelled cans, she reflected on the unforgettable images of poverty and devastation of the Haiti earthquake. "When I saw the pictures of all the orphans and people who needed help in Haiti I started to cry," she recalls. "I just felt that God was telling me that I could do something to help others."

Dueck, along with 18 other students from Valley Mennonite Academy near Winkler, was among 300 volunteers who shared their time and skills to fill, cook, clean, seal, label and pack 22,000 cans of pork chunks in late November. One of Dueck's teachers, Trudy Wiebe, said, "As teachers, we always look for activities where students can put their faith into action."

Winkler is one of more than 30 canning sites in Canada and the U.S. where thousands of volunteers assist MCC's canning crew with preserving half a million cans of turkey, beef and pork for hungry people around the world, says John Martens, chair of the Winkler meat canning committee.

Ten percent of the cans preserved in Winkler stay in Manitoba where they are distributed by food banks. The remainder are distributed by MCC worldwide in places where people are experiencing war, disaster and malnutrition.

In Manitoba, the meat used for canning is donated or purchased through financial donations. It is deboned and cut by the staff of Winkler Meats, a meat processing facility that donates its facilities for this meat canning operation.

Volunteers of all ages work six-hour shifts. This is the second year that Alyssa Unrau, 14, of Plum Coulee worked alongside her grandparents, David and Margaret Reimer. Her grandfather was instrumental in bringing MCC's mobile meat canner to Winkler in 2002.

Students and staff from Milltown Academy, a Hutterite Colony School near Eli, have volunteered annually for five years.

MCC PHOTO BY TONY SIEMENS

From left, Wesley Driedger and Elaine Dueck and other volunteers help with washing and drying cans of meat at the MCC meat canning in Winkler.

"We can't solve all the needs in this world, but each one of us can do a little bit," says principal Ron Kleinsasser.

This is the fourth year that Elaine Dueck worked a shift with her classmates. When she learned that a night shift needed more volunteers, she also worked through the night. "My hands look like prunes, but it is for a good cause," she said.

Gladys Terichow is a writer for MCC Canada.

Supreme Court of Canada begins hearings in end-of-life case

The Rasouli family believes Hassan retains awareness.

Thaddeus Baklinski

OTTAWA, Ont. (LSN.com) – Seven justices of the Supreme Court of Canada began hearings Dec. 10 in a case that could have profound implications for end-of-life decision-making in Canada.

The case concerns Hassan Rasouli. Rasouli had minor surgery in October 2010 at the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto to remove a benign tumor in his head. Following the procedure, Rasouli developed bacterial meningitis and ventriculitis. The infection caused a severe and widespread brain injury, as well as damage to the brainstem and the spinal cord. He has been in coma since Oct. 16, 2010, and is on a ventilator and being fed through a tube inserted in his stomach.

Rasouli's doctors decided that he was in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) and concluded that he had no hope of recovery. So they decided to withdraw all treatments, including ventilation.

However, Rasouli's family, including his wife, Parichehr Salasel, who was a doctor in Iran and who is his substitute decision-maker, disagreed with the diagnosis. The family sought an injunction to prevent the doctors and the hospital from withdrawing life-sustaining treatment.

Whose decision is it?

Salasel said she believes that her husband is not PVS. She stated that he is moving and he has some awareness of his surroundings. She will not provide consent to withdraw the ventilator from her husband because the action is not consistent with their religious views. As a Shia Muslim, Salasel says she believes that life must be respected and upheld until all signs of life are gone.

The Ontario courts that originally heard the case ruled that doctors must obtain consent, either from the patient or the patient's substitute decision-makers, prior to withdrawing medical treatment. If consent is not obtained, doctors must bring the case to a Consent and Capacity Board for a decision. Doctors have subsequently appealed this decision to the Supreme Court, arguing that they should have the unilateral right to decide when medical treatment can be withdrawn.

"This is not simply a scientific decision," said Alex Schadenberg of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition (EPC), "it deals with people's values and beliefs. Moreover, doctors have their own biases which would influence their judgment, and sometimes doctors make mistakes – they are simply wrong. So this unilateral power given to doctors would not be protecting vulnerable people."

The EPC is an intervener in the Supreme Court of Canada hearings about withdrawing medical treatment.

U. of Saskatchewan issues campus safety alert over 'truth about homosexuality' pamphlets

SASKATOON, Saskatchewan (LifeSiteNews) – The administration of the University of Saskatchewan issued a campus-wide safety advisory earlier this month in reaction to a pro-life activist distributing pamphlets that exposes the risks of homosexuality to students and staff.

U. of S. officials sent out the advisory the day after pro-life and anti-homosexuality activist Bill Whatcott spent Wednesday, Dec. 5, at the university handing out flyers titled "Say No to the Homosexual Agenda!"

The flyer lists some of the health consequences related to an active homosexual lifestyle and defends the Christian perspective of sex and marriage. This flyer, along with another, called "Say No to Abortion!", is part of Whatcott's "Operation Education" campaign.

"I became aware of the University of Saskatchewan's decision to issue a campus wide safety alert over my flyers after I received a call from the CBC," Whatcott told LifeSiteNews. "My understanding of campus safety alerts is they are usually for serious issues such as potential sexual predators or school shooters, not someone handing out flyers."

Students 'might need counselling'

U. of S. associate vice-president of student affairs David Hannah told a local newspaper that university officials were aware that Whatcott was within his rights of free speech to hand out the flyers, but were worried that some students or faculty might need counselling after reading them. "Based on our understanding of the law, this individual has the legal right to distribute his views and so we didn't do anything to stop him," Hannah said.

Earlier this year the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench upheld a lower court decision that acquitted Whatcott of trespassing charges for distributing "The Truth About Homosexuality" pamphlets at the University of Calgary in 2008.

In 2010 Whatcott won an appeal in Saskatchewan when Justice Darla Hunter of Saskatchewan's Court of Appeal overturned a 2006 Saskatchewan Human Rights Tribunal ruling that found Whatcott guilty of violating the province's human rights code by publicly criticizing homosexuality through a series of flyers he distributed in Saskatoon and Regina in 2001 and 2002. "The precedents set in Alberta and Saskatchewan will make it almost impossible for any university in Canada to secure a conviction against a pro-lifer who speaks up on campus," said Whatcott.

Whatcott added that the University of Saskatchewan "hasn't changed its desire to censor free speech on pro-life issues," but pointed out that as a result of the court decisions, "They know that if they arrest me, they'll be on the receiving end of a lawsuit. That is why they did nothing to stop the distribution of the flyers but instead put out a campus safety alert."

Repeated requests to David Hannah for comment on what safety concerns Whatcott's flyers presented were not returned by press time.

Columns

Flowers and Thistles
Curt Gesch

Noticing things

In *The Source*, James Michener's huge book about Palestine, we are introduced to a character named Hoopoe. The hoopoe is a bird that walks around peering into holes in the ground for food. In North America, perhaps a fat starling on your lawn might be the closest equivalent. Michener's character, Hoopoe, is an engineer who spends his time "figuring things out." He eventually figures out how to safeguard the town's water system to prevent the town from falling during a siege (obviously based on "Hezekiah's tunnel" in Jerusalem).

The children in the fictional town of Makor tease the rather pedestrian, if harmless, man, calling "Hoopoe, Hoopoe," when he walks by: looking here, thinking about this and that, investigating the soil, rocks, looking at angles and so on.

But I think the world would be better off with more Hoopoes. Not for Hoopoe a DVD from *National Geographic*. Hoopoe is puttering along the shores of Haida Gwaii, wondering how this worm, that shell and the other piece of seaweed all inhabit the same area.

*****

Once I went for my annual physical check-up and my M.D. breezed into the room and said, "So how are you doing, Curt?"

"Pretty good," was the polite reply.

"I think it looks to me like you aren't really doing so well. How's the mood? Depression bothering you again, isn't it?" He had me cold.

Quite a few years ago, my pastor visited the classroom in which I was teaching. I introduced him, and the students went back to some quiet seatwork. Pastor Jack Hielema walked around the room, looking over each student's shoulder but showing a rather cursory interest, I thought. He spoke a few words to each student in his famous whisper (Pastor Jack's whisper causes the same tremors as an earthquake rating 6.6 on the Richter scale.)

Hardly had he made his circuit when the bell rang, ending the class, and there was Pastor Jack, talking to the two students who suffered from bullying, poor self-image and socially dysfunctional families. "Hoopoe Hielema" had spent a lifetime noticing people with an eye towards pastoral care. Whenever I was with Pastor Jack, I watched him closely and saw how he (probably subconsciously) entered a room, looked around and mingled with people. I work hard at emulating his knack of noticing.

*****

When visiting someone's vegetable garden, I play a little game. I look at the leaves of red beets. If they have clear veins and dark green leaves, very good. If the leaves are covered with dark red spots I stroke my chin, hem and haw a little, and say, "Those beets need some lime."

From my neighbour I'm learning to look at cows. "Something's not right: she's walking funny, and her coat is rough," says Chris about one of my cows. And then she makes a couple of sample diagnoses, discussing possible causes and treatments.

A man named Wesley Ervasti of Sebeka, Minn., drew the attention of a couple of agriculture writers and one scientist when he noticed something about cows' noses: they have bare spots on the nostrils and exude droplets of . . . what?. . . snot? Ervasti is convinced that during pasturing the cows leave some exudate on the grasses which may be the key to increasing fertility in future crops. The verdict is not yet in on his supposition, but Ervasti isn't shy about saying that successful farming depends on "seeing *what you look at. . . .*" He notes that "on balance, observation trumps the dilettante."

When we first owned cows, I swept up the dust around the round bales and on the bottom of the feed manger and fed it to the chickens. I figured that the cows might be wasteful, but that maybe the chickens would pick through it and find something useful. Lately I've noticed that when I give a cow the choice to eat in my bale storage area, she doesn't eat much from the round bale but snuffles and snorts and uses her mouth to scrape up and chew the very "dust" I had thought was waste.

I asked a few people what was going on. Some said, "Oh, a cow knows what's good for her" or "It must taste good." I developed a theory: maybe the seeds from timothy and other grasses fell down and formed part of this dust and the cow was getting extra grain. Steffen, another neighbour, thinks it is bits of fine leaves from the grasses, alfalfa and clovers, bits that are unrecognizable, but contain the most nutrition and best taste.

*****

I suppose one could say that the type of noticing Pastor Jack taught me helps me to better love my neighbours. Some "noticing" may lead to scientific discoveries. But mostly, I think, paying attention to the world around us enlivens our curiosity, produces joy, helps us to appreciate others and helps us express our full humanity.

In the beginning was the Word, and Word was made flesh. At this time of year, we try to notice that great Fact.

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) lives in Quick, B.C., where he and Betsey have recently completed an Environmental Farm Plan. They have no hoopoes on their farm, but they have crows, ravens, whisky-jacks and magpies.

The rewards of paying attention

While writing this column, I received the following note from Virginia Lettinga, presently living in Telkwa, B.C.

"I meant to tell you about a wonderful little scene we watched from Eddy Park last week. . . . Two robins were hopping through the tree branches near the river. As we watched, one flew down to the little ice islands that were racing in the swirling current, eyed them carefully as he circled in the air, landed on one, enjoyed the ride, took a sip of water, enjoyed the ride a bit longer, and then flew back to the tree. He did this three times while we watched and while the other robin flapped around, unsuccessfully trying to copy him – he didn't seem to recognize that the low, flat icebergs were the vehicles of choice, and couldn't make a good landing on the jagged ones."

Gathering Light
Emily Wierenga

When love is longing for heaven

Sometimes I'm not sure what to do with all of the sadness in the world, so I just sort of tuck it into the envelope of my heart, all stuffed and overflowing with people's letters of cancer and child-loss and pain. And I know I'm supposed to mail those letters to God, and I send parts of them, but parts I hold onto. The parts I can't let go of. The parts that say – *if God is so good, and caring and loving, then why?*

And I'm not afraid of my questions. I know God is bigger and I know in heaven they'll either be answered or we just won't care anymore. Kind of like when you're so hungry you'll eat anything, just because it fills the hole.

I think one reason for why God allows pain is to make us hunger for heaven, and I know it will be wonderful; that while I'm afraid of death, and scared of eternity, heaven will be just as it sounds. Paradise.

Broken

I had an art show recently, and beforehand, I spent some time walking Whyte Ave – one of the hippest, most achingly honest streets in the city of Edmonton – and I could barely swallow for the need.

I met a man named Jerry Lee who wanted a smoke, and I said I'd buy him a sandwich, and instead he wanted a coffee and some "Reeses Pieces," so I bought him that. Then I said "God loves you," and he said God lived in his heart and could he pray for me? Yes, Jerry Lee, of course you can pray for me.

Then I bought fair-trade coffee at Ten Thousand Villages and learned how little children are hired overseas to make rugs from dawn to dusk at unfair wages because their tiny fingers can sew the stitches.

On my way back to the car, I ran into a boy who had my son's eyes, like he'd stolen them off his face, and he wore a long white t-shirt and jeans that hung low and he looked so wasted. As though even his skin, which was ashen, had given up. I cried and found myself angry at the people who seemed not to see, their neighbors who had God in their hearts and hell on their faces.

"You're going to be in deep mourning while the godless world throws a party. You'll be sad, very sad, but your sadness will develop into gladness" (John 16, The Message).

And sometimes, even on the brightest, sunniest day, all I know is this: so long as we have Jesus in us, we have sorrow.

Jesus came not that we might have Christmas presents and stockings and candlelight services; no, he came to bring a sword, he said. He came to upset the way things were, to show how they should become.

Because for so much of the world, celebration isn't easy. For so much of the world, Christmas means sitting in a gutter and pulling close a tattered blanket and wishing that just one person would dare to look you in the eyes.

Happiness is overrated. I am rarely happy. There is too much pain in the world to be happy. Instead, I am shooting for joy, because joy is something I can understand.

Joy is like a raft on an ocean of tears and I'm paddling that raft and picking up all of the people who are drowning. And we're all huddling together in this massive ocean, waiting for some kind of shore to appear.

And one day it will. Paradise will appear. We'll bump against the shores of heaven and Joy will become incarnate. Hallelujah.

Please visit **emilywierenga.com** *for more info about Emily who lives in Neerlandia, Alta.*

Reviews

The words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart: a writer's prayer

Acceptable Words: Prayers for the Writer
by Gary D. Schmidt and Elizabeth Stickney (editors)
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012

Nick Schuurman

A few weeks back, I sat alongside 50 or so others – mostly undergraduates and faculty members – who were gathered to hear a lecture on faith and writing given by Roman Catholic novelist and painter Michael O'Brien. From the front of Tyndale University College's Van Norman chapel, the self-taught author spoke on "The Writer in an Age of Illusion," the place of art fashioned by Christians in a world that has lost its sense of story, and the gift of art's potential to put us in our place. Following the talk, the audience was invited to ask questions.

"What advice would you give to a young writer?" someone near the back asked.

He paused for a minute, then replied: "When your creative work becomes concerned with making a product and is not an act of love, prayer is lacking and prayer is needed."

When it comes to writing, we tend to miss the point. Christians, unfortunately, are of no exception. In response to descriptions of some of the writing I have done (and I must confess, I have not done a lot), I am often asked how to go about being published, to have one's opinions and work profiled, or to make it as a staff writer for a publication. Through the assumed perspective of a world oriented towards accomplishment, rank and success, these questions would seem to make a certain amount of sense, and yet they in reality serve to undermine the very heart of the artistic task, which O'Brien suggested, is fundamentally contemplative, and motivated by love and by prayer.

In light of these tensions that so many of us face, Gary D. Schmidt, along with Elizabeth Stickney, have produced an anthology titled *Acceptable Words: Prayers for the Writer.* Schmidt, who teaches English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, as well as Stickney, his wife, have both published, and have both known the joys and difficulties of a life of writing. They assembled this volume – a sort of Book of Common Prayer for artists – in the hopes that in doing so, they would provide a means for those who write to work through some of their valleys, and to voice the gratitude, praise and lament they experience in their work. The collection features poems, hymns and prayers by the likes of Augustine, Aquinas and Donne, as well as selections from writers one might not have expected to find in a book of prayer – Rilke, Solzhenitsyn and Luci Shaw. In addition to a brief introduction, the writers included short biographies of each of the authors whose work they include.

Of course, in an age of Google, nearly all of these prayers can be easily found online. To have them assembled, and to have a bound collection which one can return to as a reminder, and as a means by which one can find in the voices of others a voice of their own, is a gift – not only for the writer, but for anyone who is committed to work as image-bearing creations of God. I leave you with a prayer written by Schmidt himself:

"Dear Lord, the pages are finished. At least, I think they're finished. And now it's time to send them out into the world – my words into your world. Let me, Lord, release them, and let me, oh let me not want anything of them but what good you will do with them. Let me not worry about "reception," which is an arrogant worry, and not truly a worry at all, but mere desire. Let me not worry about "success," for, broken as I am, that, too, is only arrogance. Lord, let the words serve. If these pages are to have a life outside of this manila folder, let them speak well to those whom you mean to hear. Then, Lord, I will know that what you gave me to work with, I have worked with; and what you gave me to use, I have used. Everything after that is up to you; so let me leave it in your hands. And Lord, one thing more: Tomorrow, of your goodness, give me another blank page, and in your mercy, set me to it" (158-159).

'A little piece of a big, big universe'

Beasts of the Southern Wild
written and directed by Benh Zeitlin
Fox Spotlight Pictures, 2012

Nick Schuurman

The day hurricane Katrina hit we were sitting around tables at a restaurant somewhere outside of Atlanta.

I finished my pizza, fidgeted with the salt shaker, and glanced at the corner of the room where a television hung, fixed on CNN. I remember the text as it crawled across the bottom of the screen, and I remember the footage of the correspondent who was struggling to stand upright in spite of the wind and the rain.

A few days later, we found ourselves volunteering with the Red Cross, offering support to those who had fled from New Orleans to Georgia in the wake of one of the deadliest hurricanes in American history.

With the news of the disaster came announcements detailing the mandatory evacuation notices that were given to residents of areas considered to be at risk. And with that news came reports of families who were refusing to leave. We couldn't understand it; from the outside looking in, theirs was a completely senseless, and potentially reckless, decision.

Televisions and radio stations aired footage of individuals who remained resolutely insistent on staying put. Among them was Patricia Kelly, a third generation resident of the Lower 9th Ward, who offered her explanation: "I don't know nowhere else that I could go to because I was born and raised here in New Orleans and I would like to stay here, you know, and rebuild from what I had lost."

Unlike many of the images of survivors that were emerging, Kelly, whose voice was heard on NPR, was among a significant number who, in the words of the story's reporter, seemed "rather composed and peaceful" in the aftermath of the disaster. "She was sitting in the shade of a beauty shop," he recalled in disbelief, "and a friend of hers was cooking some red beans and rice on a grill; they were having a picnic."

While director Benh Zeitlin hesitates to make a direct connection to that particular time and place, it is clear that his wildly imaginative 2012 film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is a depiction of one such New Orleans community.

Set in the Bathtub, a fictional wetland village located below the levee, the story centres on the lives of the recently-widowed Wink, a fisherman prone to fits of drunken rage, and Hushpuppy, his six-year-old daughter. The two, played by newcomers Dwight Henry and Quevenzhané Wallis, brazenly forge out a life for themselves in a chaotic state of semi-feral poverty.

And then the hurricane hits.

In the face of the oncoming storm, and then in its wake, the village's remaining residents rally together in a spirit of revelry and sheer defiance. Despite the damage done to their already-primitive houses, the growing strain on their access to food, and a mysterious and progressively worsening illness that threatens Wink, the community refuses to acknowledge any sort of need that would warrant a request for help or constitute a reason to leave.

When officials finally manage to escort the community's remaining residents to a nearby shelter, the extent to which they are out of place quickly becomes evident. "It looked more like a fish tank with no water," observes Hushpuppy, who, along with the others soon plan an escape in order to return to the wetland.

Beasts of the Wild is beautifully filmed, and features a narrative that functions neither as a sentimentalized take on the impact of Hurricane Katrina nor as a patronizing portrayal of an indigent American community. It offers a fantastical, moving perspective on a brutal disaster, blending prehistory and poetry, through the imagination of a six-year old.

Hushpuppy's community rallies together in stubborn defiance of the storm.

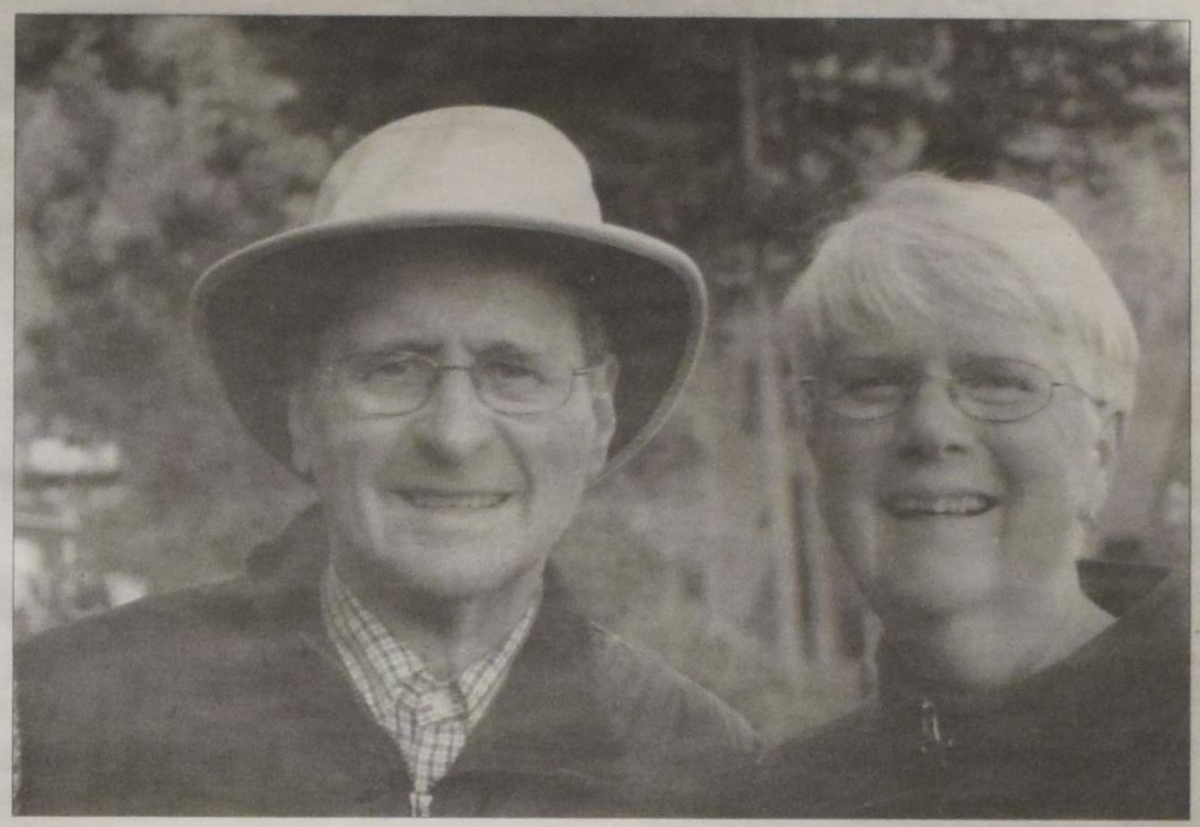
It is a film that depicts a person's deep connection to the land on which she lives. It may be hard for the viewer to see in the overgrown community of Bathtub what Hushpuppy loves so much, but it is her home and it is what has made her. I am still not sure that I understand the will to stay, but I am also not sure that is what Zeitlin, and Lucy Alibar, with whom he co-wrote the film, was concerned with capturing. The force of human spirit that is found in this mixed-race, lower-class band of eccentrics in the aftermath of extraordinary devastation is something, yes, but the willingness to finally acknowledge the pain of suffering and admit the need for assistance and relief is another matter altogether. It is that sort of breaking point that the film works towards.

The real beauty of *The Beasts of the Southern Wild* is the grace that is found after things fall apart.

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is CC's Reviews Editor. A version of this review appeared first in Converge Magazine.

Features

Recipients of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal honoured for service to Canada



Nick and Jayne Loenen (top). Bert Adema (right) receiving his medal from Lieutenant Governer Vaughn Solomon Schofield.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Nick Loenen, Bert Adema, David Koyzis and 59,997 other Canadians have something in common that they didn't share before Feb. 6, 2012, the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne. About a year prior to that momentous occasion, on Feb. 3, 2011, Governor General of Canada David Johnston announced at Rideau Hall that Queen Elizabeth II had approved the creation of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Sixty thousand Canadians, including Loenen, founding director of Fair Voting BC, former Richmond City Councillor and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Adema, director of the Indian Metis Christian Fellowship (IMCF) in Regina, Saskatchewan and Koyzis, Professor and Chair of Political Science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario and *Christian Courier* columnist, were to receive that honour between Feb. 6, 2012 and Feb. 28, 2013. The Diamond Jubilee Medal program will end on that day. Several criteria had to be met in order to be eligible. The recipient must be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident of Canada who has made a significant contribution to Canadian society within Canada, or an achievement internationally that has brought recognition to Canada. The medal can be awarded posthumously, as long as the recipient was alive on Feb. 6, 2012.

According to the Governor General's website (**gg.ca**), "The Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal is a tangible way for Canada to honour Her Majesty for her service to this country. At the same time, it serves to honour significant contributions and achievements by Canadians. The medal program is part of the Jubilee Year celebrations, organized by the Government of Canada."

A Queen devoted to service

Serving the Commonwealth has been the Queen's focus since her inauguration. In *Maclean's* special section on the Diamond Jubilee festivities, Anne Kingston recalls the Queen's comment in a "radio address from South Africa in 1947 on her 21st birthday: 'It is very simple,' she vowed. 'I declare before you that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service'" (*Maclean's*, June 18, 2012).

No one can argue with the significance of the Queen's service, though conflicting views remain on the relevance of the monarchy to Canadians. In the same issue of *Maclean's*, John Fraser, Master of Massey College at the University of Toronto, and Alan Fotheringham, columnist for *Maclean's* for 27 years, pose radically differing views. Fraser affirms that "the Crown is woven into the fabric of the Canadian story and constitutional evolution. We are what we are today thanks to many factors – hockey, weather, geography, doughnut stores, universal medicare, throw anything else into the mix you want – but the one ingredient that is never conceded by these grumbling old naysayers is that the Crown has been integral to our story again and again. It helps to give us definition, integrity and defines our commitment to an ever-evolving democracy." Fotheringham disagrees: "The silly people in Ottawa don't have the courage to show the world that we don't need a nanny to look after us." Despite his views and much to his surprise, Fotheringham received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal on May 14, 2012 at the Toronto Lawn Tennis Club from Her Majesty's representative, Sen. Art Eggleton.

> ***The Crown is woven into the fabric of the Canadian story and constitutional evolution. We are what we are today thanks to many factors . . . but the one ingredient that is never conceded by these grumbling old naysayers is that the Crown has been integral to our story again and again.***
>
> ***– John Fraser***

Canadians serving Canadians

No matter what one's view on the relevance of the monarchy, recognition of recipients of the Diamond Jubilee Medal gives observers the opportunity to celebrate the service performed by Canadians for the benefit of their nation. Nick Loenen, author of *Citizenship and Democracy: A Case for Proportional Representation*, was nominated to receive the Diamond Jubilee Medal by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, "a not-for-profit citizens' advocacy group dedicated to lower taxes, less waste, and accountable government," for his "political activism toward democratic reforms, particularly a more proportional voting system." On Sept. 18, 2012 at the Vancouver Club, CEO of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation Troy Lanigan presented Loenen with the medal.

In his article, *Selecting Representatives: A Case for Changing the Voting System and a Consideration of Alternative Systems* (**oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/politics_reform/loenen**), Loenen spells out what he considers to be the many potential benefits of making the voting system more proportional: "less party discipline; a parliamentary check on the powers of the executive; a legislative role for MLAs; a closer link between MLAs and their voters; fewer wild swings in public policy; public policy driven by the long-term public interest, rather than short-term partisan interests; fewer wasted votes; an end to vote splitting; better representation for all people especially those beyond hope; votes of more equal value; a political culture that is less adversarial and less polarized; a significantly higher voter turnout; and a greater gender equity, if the voters are so minded."

When Loenen learned that he had been nominated to receive the medal, he "felt touched that efforts which were unsuccessful should yet be recognized as a valuable contribution." As for the significance that the medal holds for him personally, Loenen says, "We think of Canada as a democracy and it is, but it is ever so primitive. Elected representatives have no policy-making role. They are called legislators, but laws are not made in our parliaments. And that must change. My medal is an encouragement to all who chafe at the dictatorial powers of Canadian prime ministers and premiers."

Bert Adema was nominated for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal by Mr. Warren McCall, MLA, Regina Elphinstone Centre. Adema explains, "Each MLA in Saskatchewan was authorized to nominate two adults and one youth for this award." On Sept. 25, 2012 in Government House, Regina, the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan Vaughn Solomon Schofield presented Adema with his medal for his work at the Indian Metis Christian Fellowship. IMCF, an urban aboriginal ministry established in 1978 in Regina and supported by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada, is an aboriginal worshipping/working ministry serving spiritual and so-

Features

QUEEN ELIZABETH II
DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL
MEDAILLE DU JUBILÉ DE DIAMANT
DE LA REINE ELIZABETH II
60
David T. Koyzis , Ph.D.
By Command of Her Majesty The Queen,
the Diamond Jubilee Medal is presented to you
in commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary
of Her Majesty's Accession to the Throne
and in recognition of your contributions to Canada.
Par ordre de Sa Majesté la Reine,
la Médaille du jubilé de diamant vous est présentée
en commémoration du soixantième anniversaire
de l'accession de Sa Majesté au Trône et en reconnaissance
de votre contribution au service du Canada.
Governor General of Canada
Gouverneur général du Canada
1952 - 2012

David Koyzis is recognized as a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal (above). Jubilee Medal (left).

David Koyzis (centre) with MP David Sweet (left) and Peter Bhatti (right) (top photo).
Troy Lanigan (left) presenting Nick Loenen with his award (bottom left photo).
Tony Kamphuis (left) receives his Medal from MP Dean Allison (bottom right photo).

cial needs. A drop-in ministry, daily prayer circle, soup and bannock lunch, pastoral care and special events take place in an atmosphere where respect for God, other people, self, creation and IMCF property are encouraged and expected.

Adema was surprised to learn of his nomination. When asked about the significance of receiving the medal, he says, "The medal confirms that the ministry of IMCF is significant. The medal informs and confirms for the supporting CRC that the ministry it supports in Regina is significant and appreciated. It is good personally to be affirmed by our MLA and community in a ministry of service with aboriginal people."

When David Koyzis learned that he was chosen to receive the medal, it was not immediately apparent to him that he was more qualified than anyone else for the honour:

"I understand that the government of Canada solicited partner organizations to submit nominations to the Governor General's office," Koyzis says. "As the Canadian government's website puts it, 'These partners, from various fields of endeavour, will recognize Canadians who, like Her Majesty, have dedicated themselves to service to their fellow citizens, their community and their country.' I was nominated by Mr. Peter Bhatti, the head of International Christian Voice (ICV) and brother to the late Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian in Pakistan's government, who was assassinated in March of last year for his efforts to repeal that country's blasphemy law, which has been the occasion for persecution of religious minorities. I have been undertaking some consultancy work for this group to help them get their message out to Canadians. ICV is one of the partnering organizations listed on the federal government's website."

Koyzis received the medal from David Sweet, Member of Parliament for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale on Nov. 4 at Central Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, Ont., where Koyzis is a member. At that time, two other members received the award as well, Rev. Dr. Clyde Ervine, and Eliza Charles, who, along with her husband, has been supporting Bhatti's work financially and had first introduced Koyzis to Bhatti.

For Koyzis, the honour of receiving the medal doesn't belong to him alone. He explains, "As *Christian Courier* readers may be aware, I am an adopted Canadian who has lived in this country for just over 27 years. For 25 of these years, I have taught political science at Redeemer University College. In that time, I have mentored quite a number of remarkable young people who have gone on to distinguish themselves in a variety of fields relevant to public service – including writing for *Christian Courier*! I cannot help but think that they are my principal contribution to Canada. Thus, this award is theirs as well. I am also grateful to Redeemer for providing a context in which this mentoring has been so successful over the decades. I am a great enthusiast for Christian education, especially at the post-secondary level. I think we're doing something crucial to the future of this country by educating its future citizens. So, Redeemer, too, has a share in the award. Finally, I thank God that he saw fit to place me in this wonderfully nurturing educational environment. I love Canada and its people, and I feel privileged to have played even a small role in contributing to its public life."

Loenen, Adema, and Koyzis' stories of service to Canada are just three among the 60,000 others that have been or will yet be recognized by the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. Let's thank God that we live in a country where various forms of service to others are valued and honoured.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.

CC would also like to acknowledge Mr. Tony Kamphuis, Administrator for the Niagara Association for Christian Education, who received a Diamond Jubilee Medal for a long and commendable record of civic service in his community. The names of other recipients came our way just before print time. Please watch for an update as we acknowledge these individuals by way of honourable mention in an upcoming issue.

Cathy Smith,
Features Editor

Features

Creation care: make it a 2013 resolution

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. . . ." Psalm 24:1.

Cindy Verbeek

"I get it," you say, "We're to take care of God's creation, but how?" It's a great question and one that points to the Holy Spirit's work in your life. But what *is* the answer? Does changing light bulbs qualify us as good stewards? Does what *I* need to do to be a good steward apply universally to all people everywhere or does it depend on where I live? The answer is yes and no, and the how is as simple and as complicated as knowing Jesus.

Two great ways to start are to cultivate wonder and get to know your place. Learn to look at the world through lenses of wonder and gratitude. See the brilliant colours and patterns in the created world, marvel at the silliness of the hippo and the beauty of a bird's song. Thank God for the sand dunes used to create the windows protecting you from the elements, praise him for the metals used to create your gadgets and for growing the tree that this article is printed on. God has placed you in a part of creation that is special to him and created good. Get outside. Discover that goodness. Learn what birds and trees live in your neighbourhood.

Here are six biblical principles that guide the way my family and I translate creation care into our daily lives:

God loves all of creation

Gen. 9:9-17 says that God made his covenant with Noah *and every creature with him* in the ark. God created, blessed and sent out to be fruitful, covenanted with and sustains *all* living things.

> Draw a map of your neighbourhood and include the non-human parts of creation. Where are the trees, shrubs and vegetation? What kind are they? Where are there places to get water, food and shelter for the other creatures who share your neighbourhood? Put the map up on your wall and pray for your neighbours – human and non-human alike.

Creation reveals God

Every creature is one part in a choir creating beautiful music only God could create. As we learn about each creature, we learn about its Creator. When one of the creatures is silenced, a voice is dropped. The song may go on but the richness, beauty and part of God's revelation to us is lost.

> Read God's description of the Leviathan in Job 41. Create a picture, sculpture or painting of the leviathan described here. What does God's description tell you about God's relationship with his creation?

Spend a minimum of five minutes every day outside if for nothing more than to experience the weather. Ask God to reveal to you something about himself, yourself and his world during this time. Better yet, pick one day each week to spend 20 minutes in silence in a forest, near a pond or beside a river. Describe in detail what you see, hear, smell and feel in a journal entry, poetry, drawing, song or your favourite way of expressing yourself. Share it with your family and church.

People are an inseparable part of creation

We share "creatureliness" with everything that exists. We are embedded in the many cycles of the biosphere (air, water, organic matter, etc.). This is not a necessary evil to be tolerated, but a glorious part of who we are that should be celebrated. Read 1 Cor. 15:40-44 and Rom. 8:23. Christ, in both his transfigured and resurrected states, had a body and we, too, will have *bodies* on the new earth.

> Research where your water, food, energy and "stuff" come from. Place a map of the world on the wall. Put a pin in all the places that you are tied to through the act of just living. Pick one of those places and learn what impact your use of resources has on the people and the place and what you can do to minimize the negative and maximize the positive impacts.

One of the easiest cycles to complete involves food. God's plan for the left-over bits is for them to rot and become nutrients for other plants. Compost all the plant material that comes from your house. You will reduce your waste by up to 50 percent and provide nutrients to the soil.

People have a special role within creation

We are *meant* to rule over creation, to practice dominion, but what is the *nature* of this rule? The Bible gives us three clues.

1) Imago Dei: We are God's image bearers and as such represent him on earth. Our rule should be modelled on his rule.

2) The Pentateuchal laws articulate a husbanding of creation that does not compromise its abundant fruitfulness.

3) Our first task is 'to "*abad and shamar*" creation, meaning "to work it and keep it."

> Read Gen 2:15. The Hebrew word *abad* means . . . to work, to do work in it, to till, to cultivate, to dress, to tend, **to serve**. Joshua 24:15 uses the same word in "But as for me and my household, we will *serve* the LORD." *Shamar* means . . . to **keep** it, to care for it, to take care of it, to guard it. The same word was used in Num. 6:24-26: "The LORD bless you, and *keep* you; The LORD make his face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up his countenance on you, and give you peace." If we were to serve creation as we serve the Lord, and keep creation as the Lord keeps us, what would that mean for our lifestyle?
>
> Take an inventory of the land and creatures that God has put in your care. How are you taking care of them to make sure that you can benefit from the fruit but not destroy their fruitfulness? Gather a group of people and pray over that land. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in how to care for the land better and then follow the Holy Spirit's promptings.

In our fallen condition, we are alienated from creation

Our rejection of God compromises the proper relationships we were meant to enjoy with God, each other *and* creation, so that we no longer live up to our high calling as God's stewards.

> Read Hos. 4:1-3. We are alienated from God, each other and from the rest of creation. Where do you see brokenness in these relationships in your life? Ask God to reveal how he wants you to start reconciling these relationships.
>
> Creation care often brings up guilt feelings. Confess the areas where you are guilty and reject the areas where guilt is unfounded. Thank God for forgiving your past actions and giving you the strength and courage to turn in the opposite direction to make things right.

God's plan of salvation includes the restoration and redemption of creation

The scope of God's redemption story is huge. It includes the redemption, restoration and transformation of the entire cosmos. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the *kosmos* . . . ." God takes the brokenness in creation seriously and sent his Son to reconcile to himself "all things" (Col. 1:20).

> Read Rev. 11:18 and 21:1-3. What happens to those who destroy the earth? What happens to the earth at the final days? How can you join God in the restoration of all things?
>
> One of the most meaningful things you can do is to stop. Re-connect with God and explore what it means to trust him to provide rather than driving creation relentlessly in our search to provide for ourselves. Observe a one in seven day Sabbath rest, and provide for the land's Sabbath rest.

Most importantly, remember this: there is nothing you can do or not do that will make God love you any more or any less than he does right now. We do not adhere to some list of rules and become eco-Pharisees. Get to know the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of the universe and become his disciple. Learn to love what he loves and care for what he cares for. As you do, the Holy Spirit will guide you in how to translate that to your everyday life. It may mean changing light bulbs, but then again it might not.

Cindy Verbeek works with A Rocha Canada in Northern B.C. To see more of how she works these principles out in her own life, visit her blog at **www.arocha.ca/author/cindy**.

Columns

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

Help, O help us to endure

It's year's end. I find myself considering not just the year past but a bigger picture: the "fleeting pages" of life's "hours and days and years and ages," as Rhijnuis Feith's hymn puts it.

It seems a truism that when you're young you're idealistic. This condition hits Christians and non-Christians alike. You're certain that you've got the right idea about pretty much everything. You and your friends are on the verge of saving the world. You (or some charismatic leader you voted for) will alleviate poverty, provide a comfortable life, avert environmental disaster, end fatal diseases and harness technology for the good of all.

When I was young I had my own version of that story. I wanted to put my faith into action. But the embarrassing evangelical "personal witnessing" I saw was not for me and my fellow Christian-liberal-arts-college students. We developed an adamant vision of what a *real* witness should be. It coalesced under the influence of a group of "Reformational" Christians I encountered at college in northwest Iowa. And it grew substantially after I moved to Canada, which became my adopted home for many years.

That "Reformational vision" convinced me that my politically, socially conservative father had been practicing a hopelessly unenlightened form of pietistic Christianity. In fact, while I was still in Iowa, he and I began to have heated arguments over my embracing of a better, broader faith.

Mark Twain purportedly said, "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." I know that feeling. Sadly, I realized the depth of my father's wisdom and the fundamental biblical sturdiness of his Reformed (if not Reformational) faith only some years after he died. But after I saw it, it was also easy to see that my dad – his daily reading-absorbing-living Scripture, his testing of the spirits – was *the* most crucial faith-influence on my life. (My mother had her own effect, a necessary softening of my father's – and my – tendency to put head over heart.)

William Van Til, c. 1940.

How are we different?

Noticeably missing from my save-the-world project was a burning desire for all people to embrace Christ as the Saviour (and avoid hell, my evangelical friends would promptly point out). I knew there are no real answers to the thorny problems of fallen humanity apart from acknowledging our underlying sickened spiritual condition and taking the only Antidote. But like many slightly diffident Christian Reformed people of Dutch descent, I was terrified of witnessing to non-Christians in any way that required me to actually talk about my faith, or even The Faith in general. My shunning of the evangelical tack, to be honest, was based nearly as much on an introverted lack of confidence as it was on a rejection of evangelical limitations. So, communal action projects that provided material help but no need to actually *say* anything about Jesus suited me and my Reformational friends just fine.

My "witnessing" fear aside, it is right to emphasize word-and-deed ministries. Here or abroad, they require straightforward Gospel proclamation *and* whatever physical-emotional help is needed. Unbelievers can (and do) hand out cups of cold water. But they don't, and can't, do it in Jesus' name and assure recipients that *He* makes all the difference in their lives, and ours, and the world.

The "civilized" world is rejecting the Saviour at a startling pace. Your private faith is harmless but the Gospel in public is hateful, we're told. It's exclusive. And racist. (In reality, a large majority of Christians worldwide are people of colour, many of whom are seriously, willingly suffering for Christ's sake. But Christ's accusers have never let facts get in the way of a good charge.)

We North Americans can no longer afford diffidence. We must bury any emotional timidness or confessional reluctance to boldly assent to Jesus' claim, "I am *the* Way, *the* Truth, *the* Life, and no one comes to the Father but by me." Then he will give us the words and strength to bear his name. But that doesn't mean he won't require us, too, to suffer for his sake.

Time is winding down toward Christ's return. The saints and martyrs in heaven are still begging Jesus not to tarry long. He assures them and us that God, finally, *will* "bring about justice for his chosen ones" (The Unjust Judge, Luke 18). Jesus concludes that parable with a penetrating question: "When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?" That invites our own question: Will you, will I, endure to the end?

For your mercy and your grace,
Constant through another year,
Hear our song of thankfulness;
Jesus, our Redeemer, hear.

Dark the future: let your light
Guide us, bright and morning Star:
Fierce our foes, and hard the fight;
Arm us, Saviour, for the war.

Keep us faithful, keep us pure,
Keep us evermore your own;
Help, O help us to endure;
Fit us for the promised crown.

Henry Downton, 1841

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC *editor living in Youngstown, N.Y.*

Artful Eye

HANK JAGT

Sparrow

I could imagine
the bold-hued Oriole
catching God's eye,
or even the clear-cut black and white Magpie
standing out in his line of vision,
but it comforts me
that His eye is on these dust-coloured bits of song.

So Many Sparrows to Oversee

So many different kinds of sparrows.
So many hairs on each head.
"How does God shoulder those commitments?"
We ask, because we are not God
and can not even comprehend a minute particle
of his omniscience
so brimful are we of our own existence.

Hank Jagt is an artist living in Petrolia, Ont. The majority of his work is representational oil and acrylic paintings and also wood sculpture. He also enjoys photography. Check out his website at ***hankjagt.com****.*

Linda Siebenga is a poet living in Central Alberta. Her latest work is Earth Against Your Cheek. *Find Linda's website at* **inscribe.org** *under Members.*

Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

Hi. I'm Cathy and I read blogs.

Did you know the proliferation of blogs on the Internet has spawned something called the blogosphere? Like the atmosphere, the blogosphere sustains life, a habitat for inquiring minds, where bloggers read, write, dream and argue. Christians are there, too, engaged in a myriad of conversations.

What I like about reading blogs

There are a million stories in the naked blogosphere, on any topic that might interest you, including frogs, dogs and hogs. For the sake of journalistic integrity, I read some of those. Admittedly, to me, they weren't that interesting. But there are an intoxicating number of Christian blogs that do interest me. Proficient bloggers embed links right into their posts, instantaneous references to other blogs, news, art, music. Reading blogs is a digital high – endless mental stimulation, one addictive click after another.

I like the transparency of blogs, which pulse with personality and honesty. I like their interactive quality and the continuous access to vibrant discussions. If I want to chime in, I can.

What I don't like about reading blogs

I worry, however, about how blogs affect reading and thinking. Sometimes it feels like I'm in the drive-through lane of a virtual library, consuming fast-food information without much reflection, my brain's dial set at 99.9 Intellect-Lite – all opinion, all the time. Rachel Held Evans wrote a post on her blog called "A Week without Opinions: Can I do it? Could you?"

Allan Kleine Deters, who blogs at *A Ragamuffin Voice*, wrote a post called "R.I.P. Deep Thinking." He quotes John Dyers (*From the Garden to the City: the Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology):* "As we cultivate the skill of scanning screens, many of us find it more difficult to read a book word by word and line by line. We seem to cultivate either the skill of deep reading or the skill of scanning . . . but it is difficult to maintain both skills." Dyers quotes Google CEO Eric Schmidt (who apparently is worrying about the very same thing I am, but making more money at it): "'I worry that the level of interrupt, the sort of overwhelming rapidity of information – is in fact affecting cognition. It is in fact affecting deeper thinking.'" And, by the way, this paragraph demonstrates the very thing I worry about! I haven't read Dyers' book and neither has Kleine Deters. He got the quote from *Leadership Journal.* Information snippets piled high on a cardboard tray?

The blogging world is insanely competitive. Blogs can be tediously self-promotional because they're the new career scaffold for publishing. If your blog is going to garner popularity, it has to stand out, so language gets harnessed to marketability. Brief is better. Edgy is better. One-upmanship, anonymity and lack of accountability combine to create the perfect environment for noxious "flaming." Yes, even among Christians. What happened with Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*, is illustrative. Top-ranked Christian blogger Justin Taylor wrote a negative post about the book before it was actually out and, in response, Bethlehem Baptist Church pastor John Piper tweeted, "Farewell Rob Bell." A hurricane of vituperation whipped around the blogosphere, not enough to permanently damage anyone's credibility or popularity, but enough to prove that no one is immune from stormy weather.

Pathfinding

Paul VanderKlay is a thoughtful culture-observer whose scriptural exegeses are creative (**LeadingChurch.com**). John Suk pushes me to think about my belief boundaries (**faithisntwhatyouthink.blogspot.ca**). *Thinkchristian.net*, produced by the CRC's ReFrame Media, delivers a daily stream of topical posts to my Facebook news feed. *Thinkchristian* was ranked 72 on the top 200 church blogs by *churchrelevance.com*, a strong score for a relatively new blog ministry. Reformed blogs now dominate the 25 top spots, says *Church Relevance*, replacing Emergent Church blogs. One explanation is that Reformed bloggers collaborate more than other blogging communities. *The Twelve* (**the12.squarespace.com**) is another blog with various writers of the Reformed persuasion. *Her.meneutics* (**blog.christianitytoday.com/women**) is *Christianity Today's* blog for women. While I might quibble about whether a blog specifically for women is necessary, the posts are well-written and insightful. *Patheos* (**patheos.com**) is worth perusing, a blog mall for all faiths.

The top ten church blogs as determined by *churchrelevance.com* are:

Between Two Worlds – Justin Taylor
Jesus Creed – Scot McKnight
Michael Hyatt – Michael Hyatt
Desiring God – Various
The Gospel Coalition Blog – Various
DeYoung, Restless and Reformed – Kevin DeYoung
Fr. Z's Blog – John Zuhlsdorf
Dr. Albert Mohler – Albert Mohler
Tim Challies – Tim Challies
The Resurgence – Various

Last word

The Word that was with God in the beginning, the Word that was God, is voicing salvation in the blogosphere. I'm grateful for Christian blogs that encourage my faith journey, for the gifted thinkers who share theirs. But sometimes the Word whispers to me: Close your laptop, visit your mom, go for a walk. Be still, and know that I am God.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. *She lives in Wyoming, Ont.*

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Your heart can find another way

Q. I am 45, married and a mother of three. Every Christmas and New Year season I struggle with a family issue that has been going on for five years now. The bottom line is that my younger sister and I had a falling out and things were said that were painful and insulting. While we live in the same province, we have not spoken to each other since that time. We were raised in Curacao, and our mother still lives there. My sister and I both married Canadian men and immigrated to this country, and we know the value of having family nearby. Before the fall-out, our families usually spent Christmas or New Year's together and I am longing to have this kind of relationship with my sister again. I also now think the feud was ridiculous and I just want to be friends and celebrate that we have one another and that we can be together! But inertia gets the better of me every time Christmas and New Year's comes along. On the other hand, I want to have a better understanding of what is happening between my sibling and I, so that I can overcome the difficulties and just appreciate her and her family in the future.

A. I am glad you are sharing your issue. I am sure there are many estranged siblings who can identify with your struggle. You do not tell me what the falling-out was about or who said what in terms of "painful and insulting" things. But after five years of stewing over it both of you will have your own stories to tell and they may be vastly different from one another. At the same time, I am curious about your longing for your sister and your eventual inertia when the festive season arrives. You sound ambivalent about working towards healing between the two of you. This may be part of your personality or you do not dare risk another exchange with her. Still, if you want to have close relationships with others, you will get hurt sometimes and so you need to learn to live with risk in that area.

I suggest this is a good time for you to accept your own, as well as your sister's, humanness. We make mistakes in life, but we need to forgive ourselves and others and move forward. Five years is a long time not to have a relationship with your sibling. I believe it was Gandhi who once said "the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." It does not need to be dramatic and you don't even need to bring it up with her. You can decide to forgive both of you on your own or before God in your prayers. Also, not all things can be solved. Sometimes we have to accept what is and move on. I suggest you send her a kind note if that fits with you. Don't wait till next year. Do it now. Let her know you miss her and want to start over. The best part about this festive season and our Christian faith is that we are redeemed and every day can be a new day. That does not mean family feuds are easy to resolve. On the contrary, we often need time to mourn the disappointments we experience within our family circle. But knowing our own shortcomings helps us accept the weaknesses of others more readily and after five years a healthier relationship with your sister could bring both of you encouragement and joy.

I also suggest you build on the strengths you both have within yourselves. The field of psychology has for far too long emphasized human weaknesses at the expense of human strengths. I am sure there is much about you and your sibling that is worth celebrating and honoring. For additional encouragement access Youtube and listen to Enya sing "The Spirit of Christmas Past" from the album *And Winter Came*. We often try to deal with our issues from an intellectual perspective and we miss what our heart may be trying to tell us. This is truly a song from the heart and it will soothe your soul.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Columns

When a child leaves us to be with Jesus, grief is hard to bear.

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

When the music fades

I've written about grief before and to be honest, it's something that I'd like to just be done with, but this is part of being human. My wife and I lost another baby this summer. It felt different this time. We hoped that we would get pregnant again, but were not expecting this pregnancy and so at the time I had a sense of joy that it could actually happen for us. Then as quick as that joy surfaced it left, as our child went to be with Jesus. I was faced with the disappointment that once again it didn't happen. I'd sure like to say that I am handling it perfectly, but how do you do that? There were far too many times when I tuned out in front of the TV, watching meaningless shows, losing myself in the food network or the house and garden shows. Maybe I shouldn't be so hard on myself. I know full well the steps to "recovery" to take, and yet I felt paralyzed to take them. When I did take the steps, it felt like I was just going through the motions. Being a human sometimes means things look and feel messy. This thing called grief has become something I just can't shake for the life of me.

Even though we have walked this road, this path of loss, before, somehow this time it feels like the music has faded and things have been stripped away. What's left feels overwhelming and it's affecting me in ways that are changing and challenging me. I know that grief changes a person. I have experienced that firsthand. When you lose someone you love (even children through miscarriage), the music stops! It didn't just fade away for me; this time it stopped. Previously, through time, the music has always started again, until my heart warms to the sound of the melodies. But when loss comes again, over and over, it has challenged my heart to continue to beat with hopes and dreams.

The interlude

A dear friend of mine encouraged me with these words: "It is during intermission where you are processing what has pierced your heart. Allow it time. It does get better. The music will rise again. The music has been quiet and mournful to the point of not being able to be heard. If you listen very closely, though, it will begin again – maybe with a weak and soft violin that quavers a little. Soon it builds: one viola, then one bass, until it eventually swells into an orchestral masterpiece which continues to heal your heart with its many notes, melodies, harmonies and compositions."

I guess that maybe this is the realistic stanza in my life for right now. To allow myself to grieve again, in hopes that a much larger picture – the whole story – is experienced when I allow myself to feel the depth of sorrow when no music plays. For just as I am willing to allow the music to fade, beauty will rise out of its ashes. It will get better. God promises that he is able to do exceedingly more than what I can think or imagine. I am reminded, even now during this time of advent, that the anticipation of Jesus' birth is also seasoned with his death and resurrection. How Jesus' birth and life on earth was this fulfillment of promises given. Then the deep sense of loss his family and his disciples would have felt when he died a criminal's death! They too must have experienced the music fading when everything went dark. Yet Jesus rose again, and those who encountered him experienced a passion that began to beat again with complex compositions which began in their own time of sorrow. It's humbling, actually, to live in the interlude. I am thankful to know that God the Father is acquainted with my suffering and sorrow, thankful that I can stand in this place, at times not facing it well, yet knowing that God is able. His truths are my foundation and my cornerstone no matter how I feel. When I feel like everything that I do or try to do is a sacrifice, deep down, I know that this is gift enough to those around me and to Jesus.

Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

Our World Today
Bert Hielema

Joseph's nightmare

God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. . . . (Gen. 41:25).

Suppose that Pharaoh, after Joseph explained those two dreams, had shaken his head and said, "Sorry prisoner, you are telling me this just to get out of jail. I don't believe a word of it."

Of course we know the real story. Pharaoh did follow Joseph's advice and implemented a sound strategy: after seven years of abundance he was ready for seven years of constant crop failures. But Joseph's long prison stay still haunted him: in his sleep, frightful scenes still caused sudden nightmares. *What if? . . .*

2013 is at our doorsteps. What can we expect in the years to come?

We have now had not seven years, but seven decades of progress. Every year since 1942, when the U.S.A. geared up for war, North Americans have grown more and more prosperous. Have we followed Joseph's counsel and prepared for possible lean years? Not really. Only Paul Martin, the once Liberal minister of finance, a devout Roman Catholic and good friend of Gerald Vandezande, had the guts to stop Ottawa's deficits when times were good, as did Bill Clinton, whose surpluses were promptly revoked by the religious "wrong" under Bush junior.

Joseph's advice prevented the famine's full effect.

Seventy years spans three generations, in which we all have grown accustomed to ever better conditions. We've forgotten how to live within our means, both financially and environmentally, as continuous growth made borrowing easy while cheap fuel gave each of us one hundred energy slaves. These times are ending.

God's promises

Lester Brown of World Watch, in his new book *Full Planet, Empty Plates: The New Geopolitics of Food Scarcity*, convincingly argues that the greatest threat we face is food scarcity. His book is packed full of data and analysis to support this. We not only have a growing world population, but also climate change, which will reduce yields because of unpredictable weather patterns. Welcome to a new world. After seven decades of unparalleled prosperity we must prepare for leaner times.

Can we blame it on our politicians? Franklin Graham, Billy's oldest boy, said on CNN that there will be an economic collapse as punishment for the U.S. electing Obama. He is right about hard times, wrong about Obama. All politicians have a short view, because they want to be re-elected. The Bible, thankfully, is different.

I am busy translating a book by Dr. J. H Bavinck, with the Dutch title *De Mensch en zijn Wereld,* which I translate as *We and Our World* (1946). Here is a small section dealing with the Kingdom. "We are now faced with a development in creation that we cannot understand and control, but of which we daily experience its terrifying consequences. We now see God's work of art embroiled in the power of demons. . . . Nowhere does the Bible elaborate on these matters, but once in a while it allows us a peek into the abyss of sorrow and hardship now evident everywhere. This is especially evident in the Gospels. When Peter's mother-in-law suffers from a fever, Jesus 'rebukes' the illness and 'it left her.' (Luke 4:39.) When Jesus with his disciples are at sea and a severe storm endangers the ship, Jesus 'rebukes' the wind and says to the sea: 'Quiet! Be still.' (Mark 4:39.) The forces behind that storm and behind that fever are simply satanic; the world of hideous demons plays a blasphemous role in these phenomena. Jesus shows us here a scenario regarding life in general – awesome storms – and what will affect us in particular – mysterious diseases – both with ominous consequences. No longer is our universe one of only beauty and harmony, but, especially in our days, one of unpredictable powers which threaten us with annihilation from all directions. The world in which we live is dominated by demons."

Bavinck wrote during World War II; I see evidence of evil today. But the good news is the coming of the Kingdom, which is why I am an optimist. All these happenings are preludes to Christ's return. We must acknowledge such a view as true and prepare for profound change. We must embrace a degree of self-sufficiency, simply because our lifestyle now does irreparable damage to God's creation. We must not only begin working on our food security, but also mentally start to prepare ourselves for these changes in 2013.

Will this happen? I remember Dr. Hendrik van Riessen at a Unionville conference in the early 1960s say that the more urgent the need for change the less capable we are: he foresaw Joseph's nightmare.

Bert Hielema is busy translating Dr. Johan Herman Bavinck's "De Mensch en zijn Wereld." His tentative new title is "We and our World." See also his blog: ***www.hielema.ca/blog***

Feature

Kim Yungblut and a machine called Morris

Bert Witvoet

Part of *Christian Courier*'s history is a mailing machine affectionately called Morris. Every Tuesday morning, Morris was called into action to spit out labels that attached themselves to the front of every copy of *CC* that went out the door. The labels were organized according to postal code. Closely associated with Morris during the years when I was editor of the paper were two women who operated it, Grace Bowman and Kim Yungblut. Grace would feed the monster; Kim would collect the bundles and stack them for the tying machine. With her quick eye she would spot the asterisks on a label that would signal a new postal code, and whisk the bundle away from the torrent of copies landing on a moving belt.

Bert and Kim share a laugh. (circa 1985)

It was Grace who started to refer to the mailing machine as Morris, Kim recalls. Morris was a name belonging to a large, red tabby tomcat, used in TV advertising and known as the world's most finicky cat. The mailing machine was equally finicky. If the amount of glue in the reservoir of the machine was too high or too low, anything could happen – the labels could go flying every which direction.

Grace and Kim never allowed Morris to spoil their fun when things went wrong. Grace might utter a strong swear word like "Oh, brother," and that would be a sign for Kim to start laughing. Now Kim's laugh was infectious as well as loud, as everyone who has worked at *CC* will remember. In fact, both Kim's and Grace's laughter would often spill into all the nooks and crannies of the large open *CC* office, even into the closed-off editor's office in front.

A serious Kim at the typesetter shortly after starting work at CC.

I remember a time when I was in my office taping an interview with someone for a story. When I later played back the interview, I could clearly hear the loud laughter of Kim and the slightly softer giggles of Grace washing over the questions and answers on the tape. When I allowed the other co-workers at *CC* to listen to the tape, Kim was embarrassed. But what the tape revealed were two women immensely enjoying what seemed like a dirty and mundane job –mailing the paper.

Fun, fellowship and laughter

Kim recalls those days with great fondness. She started out as a typesetter in 1981, after she responded to an ad in the *St. Catharines Standard*, placed there by *CC* editor Keith Knight. But the highlight for Kim was always the Tuesday morning mailing time, when she and Grace would fight with Morris. Morris began to show his age by stuttering to a halt even when the level of glue was right. After Grace retired, two other fun-loving women, Rose der Nederlanden and Sonya VanderVeen Feddema, joined Kim in attending to the aches and pains of a failing Morris, that is, until Morris was honourably retired, and the women switched to manually sticking labels onto copies of *CC* in Rose der Nederlanden's kitchen. Again, mailing time became for the women a most joyous time, filled with laughter. Kim remembers it as her bi-weekly therapy session.

Rose, Kim, Grace and Sonya at a recent luncheon.

Unfortunately, "progress" has caught up with the women. A few months ago, *CC* outsourced the mailing of its paper to a Christian company called C ME Mailing, putting to an end the days of fellowship and laughter for Kim, Rose and Sonya. None of them, including all former workers at *CC*, will forget the cascade of laughter that used to emerge from the mailing room. At age 51, Kim looks back at her 31 years at *CC* as a God-given time of much blessing and joy.

It has been rumoured, although we could not confirm it, that in the past, when subscribers opened their copy of *CC* that had appeared in their mailboxes that morning, they could hear faint echoes of a circle of women shattering the silence with buckets of pure fun. But that, too, has come to an end. The future is here.

Shed a tear for Morris. Shed a river of tears for Kim Yungblut, Grace Bowman, Rose der Nederlanden, Sonya VanderVeen Feddema and all those who were baptized with unadulterated gales of levity, glee and mirth in the days …

WHEN all the world was young, lad,
And all the trees were green;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away;
Yungblut must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day.

(with apologies to Charles Kingsley)

Bert is a former editor of CC *living in St. Catharines, Ont.*

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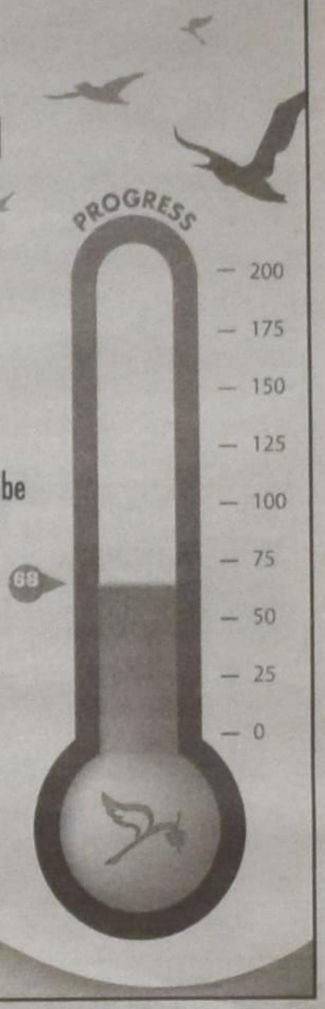

CHRISTIANCOURIER

Making a difference

"I don't have time to read!" a man told me recently. He seemed interested in *Christian Courier*, but not ready to subscribe just yet. "Get all your writers to read their articles out loud, record them, put them online and I'll listen to the podcast version while I'm walking my dog." I had to laugh. We're working hard to improve *CC*'s website. You can even download an app onto your smartphone now, but podcasts may be a ways off. Then again, in God's hands, nothing is out of the question.

We want to thank each of you for subscribing to *Christian Courier* this year and for supporting our Carry Us Forward Campaign. We are happy to welcome 68 new subscribers so far, and we're confident you'll help us keep that number climbing.

As editor, I firmly believe that *CC* has a vital role to play in our contemporary culture. I've heard from many of you that the interaction between generations – among our editors, readers and writers – gives you "hope and courage," as one reader described it. "I love the changing-but-not face of *CC*," another subscriber says. "The younger flavour brings hope and is hugely inspiring and encouraging for many of us boomers."

This paper is making a difference for the Kingdom – in whatever format you access it. We'll let you know when we add podcasting. Meanwhile, may God bless you in 2013.

– Angela Reitsma Bick

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Obituaries

Jim (Jentje) Bergstra

Dec 30, 1924 - Nov 19, 2012

Our Dad and Grandpa passed into glory peacefully at his home in Owen Sound. His 87 years of life were marked by a love for life, his family, the Lord and His church, and he set a Godly example for many.

Loving husband of Wilma (Willemke) Bergstra (Bouma) for 63 years.
His children and grandchildren mourn his loss:

Mary and Dick Both
Suzy, Marianne and Matyas, Jared and Michelle, Aaron, Willem

Stuart Bergstra and Ann-Marie MacDairmid
James and Kaira, Findlay (†2006), Evan

Gary Bergstra and Fran Exel

Tom and Wilma Bergstra
Caitlin, Peter and Danièle, Graham, Marlyse, Janelle (†1993)

Raymond Bergstra
Nigel, Tristan

The funeral was held on Nov 22, 2012 at First Christian Reformed Church, Owen Sound.

Correspondence address: Mrs. Wilma Bergstra
Hannah Walker Place
846 2nd Ave. W
Owen Sound ON N4K 4M5

Hertogenbosch, Nld — Holland Christian Homes, Brampton
April 5, 1922 — Dec. 4, 2012

Prov. 3:6

On Tuesday Dec. 4, 2012, the Lord took home our much loved father, grandfather and great-grandfather at the age of 90.

Zwier Adriaanse

Beloved husband of Anne Adriaanse (Van Helden)

Much loved father and opa to:
Joanne & Oscar Feenstra – Acton, Ont.
Rick & Christine – Guelph, Ont.
Alex, Anne, Lucas
Jason & Michelle – Rockwood, Ont.
April, Ethen
Shane – Acton, Ont.
John & Cathy Adriaanse – Barrie, Ont.
Valerie – Toronto
Darryl – Barrie
Christopher – Toronto
Peter – Brampton

He was survived by two sisters and their families in Holland and predeceased by two brothers and one sister.

"Saved by Grace."

Memorial contributions may be made to
John Knox Christian School building fund:
82 McLaughlin Rd S, Brampton ON L6Y 2C7

On Saturday, December 1, 2012,
the Lord took home
our dearly loved mother, Oma and great-Oma

Gesina Christina Aalbers (ter Haar)

at the age of 95 years.

Gesina was predeceased by her husband, John Aalbers, in 1984.

She will be missed by her children:
Lisa and Ed Semplonius – Orono, Ont.
Linda and Henk Timmerman – Drayton, Ont.
Gary and Rita Aalbers – Strathroy, Ont.

11 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren

Psalm 121

Correspondence address:
L. Semplonius
5701 Ochonski Rd.
Orono ON L0B 1M0

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For more information visit **www.crcna.org/EDsearch**

Direct all inquiries to Mr. Loren Veldhuizen,
Executive Director Search Committee Chair
veldhuizen45@gmail.com

New Life Church (a CRC Ministry)
is an exciting, contemporary-styled ministry located in Abbotsford, BC. The congregation is enthusiastically engaged in the mission of "touching lives with the transforming love of Jesus."
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Complete details can be found on our website at **www.newlifecrc.ca**.
Please send a cover letter, statement of faith, and resume to:
EP Search Team, New Life Church,
35270 Delair Rd, Abbotsford BC V3G 2E2
or e-mail it to nborg@newlifecrc.ca

The Human Resource Team of **Mountainview Christian Reformed Church** in Grimsby is searching for a

Worship/Music Director

for 24 hours per week.
A job description for this position is available from Nelly Baarda at nbaarda@mountainviewcrc.org.

Anyone interested in this position is invited to submit an application to Sue Kikkert at suekikkert@hotmail.com.

Please include a brief history of your work experience that you believe is appropriate for this position.

Applications for either the Worship Coordinator's position for 12 hours per week or the Music Director's position for 12 hours per week will also be accepted.

Bethel CRC in Listowel Ontario is seeking a Pastor for approximately 50% position for

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We are looking for a Pastor that is willing to be involved in a Team Ministry that will help to implement the vision plan recently adopted for the church. We are looking for a candidate who is willing to live in the Listowel area.
[Contact the church if you would like a copy of our job description.]

Please send enquiries to our Human Resources Committee at

officebethelcrc@gmail.com
or 519.291.4000.

Thank you CRC Extension Fund

Many of our *Christian Courier* advertisers have been long term supporters of the paper. Such foundational and sustained support deserves to be publicly thanked. So, periodically, as we have space, we are doing just that.

One of those steady pillars of advertising support has been the **CRC Extension Fund**. Harry Houtman, MA, CFP, Administrator and Secretary-Treasurer of the Board, gives some background on this long-time friend of *Christian Courier*:

"The CRC Extension fund is a non-share corporation (that's technical for being a non-profit) and it is a registered charity (so we do not pay income tax). Because we can support ourselves, we do not request donations.

It operates to accept deposits from investors, and the board of directors turn those investments around as lower interest mortgages to Christian Reformed Churches and Christian schools across Canada. We have hit the $100 million mark under administration, so some 170 borrowers are appreciating these all-time lowest interest rates, currently 3.0% (while investors earn 2.75%) Rates are set quarterly, so no one (borrowers) is stuck paying too much, or (investors) earning too little.

A board of directors of six persons is well-experienced with varied backgrounds, and is a hands-on managing board, acting as the credit committee to review and approve all applications."

Many churches and Christian schools within the *CC* community have been built or renovated by way of mortgages and loans through the **CRC Extension Fund.** *Christian Courier* has also benefitted by way of advertising revenue and generous donations from this important organization. We invite our *CC* readers to offer their appreciation to Harry and others involved with the Fund for the ways in which they implement a broad kingdom outlook in their financial work. And we at *Christian Courier* also say, "Thank you for your continuing support."

– Cathy Smith, Features Editor

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Brain Teasers (see answers p. 19)

1. Johnny's mother had three children. The first child was named April. The second child was named May. What was the third child's name?

2. A clerk at a butcher shop stands five feet ten inches tall and wears size 13 sneakers. What does he weigh?

3. How much dirt is there in a hole that measures two feet by three feet by four feet?

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec 22 Musica Sacra Chorus, Arise Shine for thy Light has Come, 8 p.m. Church of the Epiphan, 560 Dundas St., Woodstock, Ont. See ad Nov 26 issue.

Jan 20 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Feb 15-17 Marriage Encounter Weekend. Best Western Hotel & Conference Centre, St. Cathrines. For information and to register, see reformedme.org.

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Oliebollen

(makes about 35)
- 1 kg/2.2 lbs wheat flour
- 1 liter water
- 25 grams/1 oz salt
- 50 grams/2 oz sugar
- 80 grams/3 oz packaged yeast
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- lemon juice
- 200 grams/7 oz raisins
- 100 grams/4 oz chopped apple
- oil for deep frying
- icing sugar to sprinkle on top

Dissolve the yeast in the water and mix for 10 seconds. Add the flour and using an electric mixer (lowest setting) mix for well for about 20 seconds.
Add the salt and sugar, cinnamon, a few drops lemon juice, the raisins and the freshly-cut diced apple. Mix well.

Set aside to rise for 45 minutes.
Heat the oil to about 180°C/350°F. Form balls using two spoons or an ice scoop and deep fry the oliebollen - usually a few at a time, for about 6 minutes each. You might have to dunk (and turn) them halfway through.
Drain on absorbant paper and liberally sprinkle the hot oliebollen with ising sugar.

This is just one of the many possible recipes for oliebollen. If so desired, cinnamon and apple could be left out, but they make for an interesting flavor.
You might want to also add a 100 grams/4 oz. mix of currants, and chopped candied fruits (sukade). Another alternative is to use a bottle of (brown) beer instead of the same amount of water.

If this all sounds too complicated, remember, the mix for oliebollen comes in a package, available from most Dutch deli stores.

http://www.godutch.com/newspaper/recipes

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Brain Teaser Answers (p.18): 1. Johnny. 2. Meat. 3. There is no dirt in a hole.

News

Persecution complex:
Do North American Christians face real discrimination?

Phil Christman

Repeatedly during the U.S. Presidential campaign – which, let us give thanks, is over – political pundits warned of increasing "persecution" of Christians under President Barack Obama. Most of this talk struck me as meaningless or mendacious, and still does –the usual failure to distinguish between others' tolerance of your beliefs and others' enthusiasm about them. But it's good to question one's knee-jerk reactions. And so I recently found myself paging through *The Survey of Religious Hostility in America*, a joint product of two U.S. right-wing think tanks, the Liberty Institute and the Family Research Council – released in September 2012, as partisanship hit its quadrennial peak. Download it yourself (**downloads.frc.org**). It's worth a look.

The first thing that struck me about this report – aside from its title, which commits the First Amendment blooper of treating "hostility" as a threat to liberty rather than its byproduct – was the terrifying Executive Summary. "A federal judge threatened 'incarceration' to a high school valedictorian unless she removed references to Jesus from her graduation speech," screamed the first bullet point. Following blurbs told of an old folks' home (in Texas, no less!) where "city officials prohibited senior citizens from praying over their meals" and of "a public school official [who] physically lifted an elementary school student from his seat and reprimanded him . . . for praying over his lunch." Scary stuff indeed. I had always felt that U.S. Christians, regarded in any light but, perhaps, that of eternity, were among the most fortunate people ever to have lived, with our tax-exempt buildings and our demographic dominance. But maybe I was wrong.

Then I read past the first page.

What struck me most of all, as I read about the cases discussed in *The Survey* – in some cases I had to do a lot of extra Googling to figure out how all the appeals and challenges and counter-appeals and counter-challenges ended up – was that it is largely a victory chant disguised as a funeral march. In most of the cases where religious liberty was genuinely threatened, higher courts came down in favour of Christians. Responsible judges again and again stepped in to affirm that, yes, seven-year-olds *are* allowed to pray over their school meals, and yes, teenagers *are* allowed to give their classmates pencils bearing the irksome jingle "Jesus is the Reason for the Season." Yes, old people *are* allowed audibly to thank God for the canned food meagerly parceled out to them by the City of Houston. When an overzealous Houston National Cemetery employee told a grieving widow that her dead veteran husband wasn't allowed a religious ceremony, *higher courts ruled that that guy was wrong*. And the poor kid who mentioned Jesus in her valedictory speech? She did *not*, of course, go to jail. What these cases were about, it emerged, was legally illiterate bureaucrats making fools of themselves in courts of law, and then losing, as they should. The Nurse Ratcheds of the world will always be with us. Freedom of religion laws, such as the U.S.'s First Amendment or the Canadian Charter's Fundamental Freedoms sections, cannot rid us of such people. What law can do is give us a way to fight back. *The Survey*, sometimes against its will, testifies that this weapon remains a potent one.

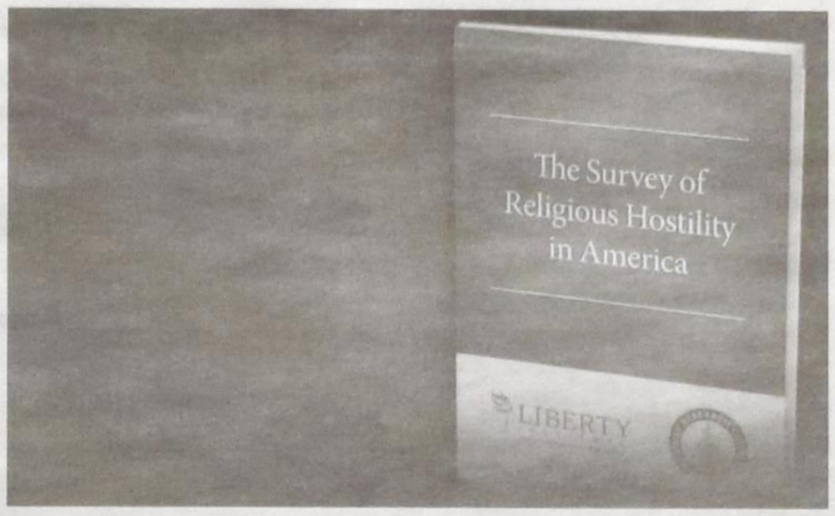
Hildebrand did not go to jail for referencing Jesus.

Voice of the victims

As I read on, I noticed that sometimes the iron boot was on the wrong foot. That is, Christians had gotten in trouble for ignoring the rights of other people. For example, one woman was dismissed from her position as a school chaplain because she suffered from narcolepsy (and not because, like some priests I know, she induced it). Her resulting claim of discrimination is understandable. Narcolepsy is a handicap, and the handicapped, like anyone, need to be able to earn a living. In another case, a cash-strapped Christian afterschool program was forced to serve non-allergenic snacks following parental complaints. Such a verdict would once have seemed as frivolous to me as it evidently does to *The Survey*'s authors, until I met a woman who literally goes into anaphylactic shock every time she smells peanuts.

I would like to think that the persecution complex evident in *The Survey* is a U.S.-specific pathology. But a glance at the press releases of an organization like Toronto's Campaign Life Coalition, or at the career of the activist Bill Whatcott, suggests otherwise. The tactics are similar to those used by *The Survey*'s authors. Stories are narrated only as far as their most inflammatory point, then broken off. Unless she does further research, the outraged reader never learns that the charges were soon dropped, the lawsuits settled, the judgments overturned.

Now what bothers me about this sort of rhetoric is not that it brings attention to these cases. Freedom of religion is nothing to be complacent about, and it's never a bad idea to keep an eye on zealous bureaucrats. Heaven help the school employee who reprimands any praying child (of any faith!) in my presence. But these repeated claims of "persecution" are disrespectful, I submit, to the millions of Christians in other parts of the world who suffer prison and death merely for believing that Jesus is God's Son, and who lack the protection of the law. Organizations like Open Doors and Voice of the Martyrs, not to mention Amnesty International, regularly furnish examples of what real Christian persecution looks like, in Egypt, in Tanzania, in North Korea, in Iran. Or we can look south, to Latin America, where nuns and priests were frequently murdered throughout the 1970s and 1980s for advocating economic justice. North American Christians often fail to speak out against these injustices, sometimes from ignorance, sometimes from *realpolitik*. Consider, for example, what would happen to a U.S. church that took seriously the large number of Arab Christians whose lives are put at risk by U.S.- and Israeli-sponsored violence. Or consider the Harper government's ongoing failure to staff its proposed Office of Religious Freedom, which enjoys the uncomfortable twin mandates of "speaking out against religious persecution" and "not angering Canada's trade partners."



I had always felt U.S. Christians were fortunate. Was I wrong?

Calling ourselves persecuted disrespects the very real suffering of Christians around the world.

In most of the cases where religious liberty was genuinely threatened, higher courts came down in favour of Christians.

Moreover, such claims blind us to the very real worldwide suffering of *people who aren't Christians*. Hate crimes against Muslims, Jews, and now Sikhs are anything but unknown in the U.S. Nor is Canada a "safe haven," as Canadian Muslim commentator Shahla Khan Salter has pointed out in an excellent Huffington Post column. The Bahai have always struck me as among the least offensive people ever to walk this earth, but the Iranian government imprisons them by the thousands. As for atheism, it's not a "religion," technically speaking, but the secular humanism that often accompanies it certainly is (at least as I use the term); and a qualified secular humanist would have had an easier time running for President in 1800 than she would today.

North American Christians might be well-advised to save the word "persecution" for people who lack the protection of the courts. We might be even better-advised to come alongside such people, whether they belong to our faith or not. In doing so, we may come to learn, at last, what persecution really looks like – bullies hate being called out. Either way, we will be practicing compassion, and that's the best form of evangelism I know.

Philip Christman holds an MFA in Fiction from the University of South Carolina and an MA in literature from Marquette University. Starting in the fall of 2013, he will teach undergraduate writing at the University of Michigan.